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BEN BRION,

The Trapper Captain; or, Redpath, the Avenger.

A ROMANCE OF THE RIVAL FUR BRIGADES.

BY DR. J. H. ROBINSON,

AUTHOR OF "PATHWAY; OR, NICK WHIFFLES, THE OLD TRAPPER OF THE NORTHWEST," "NIGHTSHADE, THE ROBBER PRINCE OF HOUNSLOW HEATH," "HURL, THE HUNCHBACK," "THE KNIGHT OF THE RED CROSS," ETC., ETC.



HE MADE TWO CIRCLES ROUND THE MOUNTAINEER AT A FULL RUN, CLINGING TO THE FARTHER SIDE OF THE ANIMAL, AND PEERING OVER HIS BACK AS IF RECONNOITERING IN TRUE ABORIGINAL STYLE, SHOUTING AND YELLING.

Ben Brion, THE TRAPPER CAPTAIN; OR, REDPATH, THE AVENGER.

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CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH THE HERO MAKES HIS BOW TO THE
READER

It was night on the Western prairies and the stars were glowing silvery and soft in the azure arch. The gauzy spray of clouds sailing at intervals across the quiet heavens, obscured not the mild lustre of the moon, nor cast a shadow upon the wilderness.

A youth of slender figure, clad in garb befitting the hunter and backwoodsman, was standing with meditative brow upon a gentle eminence, leaning gracefully upon his rifle, which was of approved make and studied finish. His features, though not strongly masculine in mould, were not uncomely, nor without the prestige of thought. His maturity of expression was notably in contrast with his otherwise youthful person. His eyes were somewhat dreamy, impressing the physiognomist with the idea that his imagination dwelt in a world vague and impracticable, far removed from the scenes of this but too real sphere.

Below him, at the base of the hill, the waters of Kansas River were flowing; while at his left the distant peaks of the Rocky Mountains were visible, towering in their stern, unchanging grandeur like everlasting guardians of the North—an army of eternal occupation, which the might of finite man can never conquer; upon his right, prairies unfolded their scenery like an endless panorama, diversified by strips of timber, swamps of grass, and shrubbery. At a short distance from the youth, the smoke of a blazing fire arose in a misty column, forming numberless fantastic wreaths and phantom shapes. A solitary figure was stretched beside the burning faggots, sleeping as soundly, apparently, as if domiciled beneath a sheltering roof, and couched upon the softest bed. The youth approached the spot; at the sound of his footsteps the man sprang to his feet, casting quick, sharp glances around him. In a moment his gaze was fastened upon the intruder, and he relaxed his guarded watchfulness. With his raven eyes he scanned the object that had excited his attention, with stronger indications of contempt than curiosity or alarm. The youth advanced, and begging pardon for the intrusion, expressed a hope that he had not disturbed his dreams or awakened his fears.

The person to whom these words were addressed, smiled; and turning his back partially toward the youth, replied, rather sarcastically, that he seldom took the trouble to dream; as for fear, Ben Brion was a stranger to it, and had certainly seen nothing to excite such an emotion for a long time. He trusted he had too long been a sojourner in the West to be terrified at trifles. He then stroked his beard, shrugged his shoulders, and smiled again. The young man doubtless understood the stranger's meaning, but without appearing to notice it, added, that if his company would not be considered particularly disagreeable, he would venture to take a seat by the fire, which seemed to him very cheerful and inviting.

The individual who had styled himself Ben Brion replied, that he was at liberty to please himself in that respect, though he fancied that a stuffed chair, or a feather bed, would agree better with his constitution than any accommodation he could offer. The youth answered to the effect that he was not fastidious; that a blazing fire would suffice for a night so serene and tranquil. He seated himself, placed his rifle on the ground beside him, and instead of turning his attention to Brion, resumed his study of the heavens with an abstracted air.

At first, Brion scarcely deigned to notice the stripling; but presently condescended to honor him with furtive glances, which, judging by the expression of his features, did not increase his esteem for his visitor. He obviously considered him too poor in experience to be entitled to any considerable share of attention from

one who had grown ripe in adventure, and won his knowledge of the Western wilds through much hardship and danger.

The sturdy trapper and mountaineer is prone to pride himself not a little on his skill and powers of endurance, and to regard the unsuccessful, ineffective, and uninitiated, in his wandering, perilous life, with other feelings than respect or admiration. Brion might well draw comparisons, and measure his physical manhood with the youth, inasmuch as his person was not wanting in masculine development or athletic grace. In external appearance the two were quite at variance, presenting scarcely an observable feature of similarity. The difference to a third party would have been very marked.

At that period there was much rivalry existing between the various organized fur companies, which often led to the most lamentable results. The parties kept a jealous watch of each other, resorting to all the unmanly arts of low cunning to mislead, baffle, and injure a rival enterprise. These wars of interest were in continual operation, ultimating not unfrequently in bloody rencontres and terrible reprisals. Being in the employ of the American Fur Company, Brion, not unnaturally, began to feel suspicious of the youth, and query whether he was not in the employ of the adverse confederacy—a spy on his movements, perchance. This conjecture was not calculated to soften his prejudices, as may be imagined, because opposition was then raging with great bitterness, aggravated by mutual acts of hostility. It was a very important season for those who were ambitious, to profit by the hunter's craft. It was early in May, and the trapping campaign was about to open. The rival associations were hurrying to the rivers and lakes where game abounded, each nervously anxious to outstrip the other, and obtain all the advantages of a choice of ground; and, with that object in view, took every conceivable means to conceal their own movements, and deceive and retard the opposite interest.

Brion, having tarried at Fort Leavenworth to complete some necessary transactions relating to the American Fur company, was then proceeding to join the band, which had started several days in advance. Being made acquainted with these particulars, the reader will be able to form a tolerably correct idea of the trapper's position, and the train of thoughts the appearance of the youth, under such circumstances, would be likely to awaken. We must do him the justice to remark, that he was not innately inclined to be discourteous or suspicious; but long experience in the ways and wiles of antagonistic parties had rendered him keenly awake to strategy and covert dealing. Distrust, once aroused, is apt to thrive on petty occasions, and grow stronger; and possibly it was thus with the trapper. He examined the stripling more in detail; but despite his unfriendly doubts, was forced to acknowledge, to his conscience, that he could see nothing that savored of evil in his comely face. He had serious thoughts of detaining him, however, without his consent; and, by adroit cross-questioning or positive menace, draw forth his purpose.

But the next moment, he was ready to blush for planning such a violation of wild-wood hospitality. He simply concluded to watch his visitor, and if he shared the comforts of the fire during the night (which he seemed disposed to do), he would take such steps to fathom his object as his judgment might suggest. With this intention, he stretched himself upon his blanket. For a short time he kept his face turned toward the youth. Anon his sight grew unsteady; the stranger became confused with the fire, the trees, the shadows in the background, the skies, and the stars; and so Brion sank into slumber.

Upon awaking in the morning, his first impulse was to look for the youth; but he was not there. Near the spot where the trapper had slept was a dead rattlesnake, which he must have killed before departing. He had left a mark of good-will, Brion could not but confess. The serpent might have wounded him fatally while he slept, had not the friendly offices of the youngster prevented such a catastrophe.

His simple morning meal dispatched, he caught his horse (which had been side-lined, and allowed to feed upon the newly-grown grass at the distance of a hundred yards from his bivouac) and resumed his way in a western direction toward the Platte or Nebraska River. Three days passed without bringing any nota-

ble adventure to the sturdy mountaineer. On the afternoon of the fourth, he saw a traveler approaching, mounted upon a large sorrel horse, the proportions and movements of which were not calculated to impress the observer with a very high opinion of his qualities. The animal was of ample size, but presented various bony outlines and angles, seemingly indicative of scarcity of forage, or constitutional marasmus. The man riding this unprepossessing beast is worthy a passing description.

His garb was strikingly fantastic, and would have appeared, to prevailing taste, very incongruous, being made up of an odd mixture of savage and civilized apparel. He was of low stature, but of singularly masculine development, broad shoulders, and prominent chest. His face had a good-humored expression, despite the swamp of beard that covered it, and the elk-skin cap drawn low upon his brow. There was the prestige of fun in his small eyes, which had a constant twinkle. His rifle was slung across his back by a leather strap. When within fifty rods of Ben Brion, he raised a loud war-whoop and put his beast to a gallop, performing a series of Indian evolutions with ludicrous effect. He made two circles round the mountaineer at a full run, clinging to the farther side of the animal, and peering over his back as if reconnoitering in true aboriginal style, shouting and yelling.

To humor his whim, Brion dismounted and rested his rifle on the pommel of his saddle to receive him with the precaution due to his assumed character. The stranger gradually drew near, and the parties, with proper formality, saluted, and extended the hand of friendship. Many such meetings transpire on the wide prairies of the West. Whatever feeling of distrust Brion was disposed to harbor at first, gave place to geniality, when he learned that his new acquaintance was not connected with any organized fur company, but prided himself in belonging to that roving, independent class known as free trappers, whose homes were the mountains and prairies, and whose pleasure was the excitement of danger.

Buckeye—such was the rover's name—was in good spirits, and enlivened the way by his witticisms and strange tales. At nightfall, they encamped together quite amicably, Brion taking considerable pains to enlist Buckeye in his brigade of hunters; but he intimated that he preferred liberty to the gold and authority of a partisan leader.

Another serene evening followed. Unable to sleep, Brion left his hard couch to contemplate the starry beauties of the night, and muse upon the arduous duties upon which he was entering. The placid skies, the mellow light, the murmur of glistening waters, addressed his consciousness like pleasant voices. While yielding to the soothing influences around him, and gazing dreamily at the varied aspects, Brion fancied he heard a slight movement in a group of young poplars at his right. Disciplined in a school of severest watchfulness, he was alive to sounds inaudible to unpracticed ears. He advanced cautiously toward the spot whence the noise proceeded. He imagined, as he parted the branches of the trees, and stepped into the thicket, he caught a vague glance of an object in rapid motion beyond the bushes, deeper in the shadow. It might have been a human figure, or it might have been but the reflection of a cloud thrown transiently upon the open space. With his rifle ready for instant use, Brion moved forward. On the margin of the wood, he paused and examined the locality. He was much surprised at finding an Indian hatchet sticking into a tree near him. He drew it forth; the handle was yet warm from the belt of its owner. A minute had not elapsed, obviously, since it had been hurled into the yielding bark. The mountaineer looked for a fresh trail, but was for some time unsuccessful, until going farther from the tree, he found a spot where the grass was bent, as if pressed by a human foot. He followed the trail for a few rods, when it suddenly ceased; he could trace it no farther.

The circumstance perplexed Brion greatly; for his skill in tracing a trail amounted almost to instinct. Ascending a ridge close at hand, he scanned the country on either side as far as he could see, but without making any additional discovery. He returned to his campfire, thoughtful. Buckeye was sleeping, and "Flash," his horse, was standing close by him, with ears erect and vigilant. Trained, like his master, to a life of peril, like him he had learned watchfulness. Some sound had reached

him to excite his fears or curiosity, and put him on the alert.

"Faithful creature!" mused Brion. "Experience has quickened his senses, and made him little inferior to reasoning beings."

The partisan (the leaders of these enterprises were thus called) awakened the trapper, and related what had occurred. Buckeye stirred the fire, took a bite of tobacco, rubbed his forehead, and gave signs of uneasiness.

"There's a great difference in circumstances," quoth he, sagely. "Some things are easy to explain and some isn't!"

When he had expressed this sentiment, he aimed a jet of dark-colored extract at a blazing brand. "Flash," hearing his master's well-known voice, came up and placed his nose on his shoulder, as if soliciting companionship.

"The cretur knows me, stranger, and is restless when I'm a good way off. We couldn't part, Flash and I couldn't. 'Twould be a sorry day for both of us, if he should change owners. But I hope that'll never be. 'Twould break his heart to have a redskin back him. But that's nothing to do with the subject; and, as I said afore, in different words, some matters are mighty mysterious, and hard to get at understandingly. There's strange characters in this wild kentry, and one don't allers know what's arter him. The nateral reptiles of the soil have a heap of cunnin', and it's never safe to shet both eyes at night. We're tracked—that's evident enough; but by whom, is another question. There's danger at our backs, but which of us two is spoke for, I can't say. I'll tell you more about it arter we've passed Fort Laramie; that is, if we both should be alive then."

"It would be well to move off, leaving our fire burning, I suppose," returned Brion. "It is our duty to be reasonably cautious and careful of life. There's a Scriptural injunction laid upon us to be wise as serpents."

"If a parson had said that, it couldn't have been more to the p'int. I know of a very quiet campin'-ground a few miles farther on, where I passed a night, some months ago, when the heathen reptiles had somehow got wind of my movements."

The parties mounted their horses, and the fire, where they had anticipated passing an undisturbed night, was soon far behind. The spot referred to by Buckeye proved a fitting place for their purpose, being sheltered by large rocks and trees, and hemmed by a crescent-like bend in the river.

Brion felt at home. The wide sky arching over him in unveiled beauty, with its starry hosts; the spreading prairies, the distant mountains, the running waters and fluttering leaves, were things that had voices, and addressed him with pleasant language. The mountaineer was entirely satisfied with his mode of life. He felt no desire to be other than he was. There was a charm (for him) in the atmosphere of the wilderness; while the certainty of danger added new zest—making him more in love with his calling. Like Buckeye, he had been a free trapper, but the strong inducement held out to him by the American Fur Company, had (after considerable hesitation and rather against his independent predilections) caused him to accept the post of "partisan," or leader of the enterprise. He knew it was a trying and difficult position, but trusted that he should be able, by his experience in trapping and hunting, to give satisfaction to all concerned.

When he resumed his way on the ensuing morning, the glowing stories of Buckeye, concerning the pleasures and excitement of a free trapper's existence, made him half regret his engagement. Before noon he overtook the band, consisting of about seventy-five men, amply provided with pack-horses and mules.

"I want no sich creters as them," said Buckeye, pointing to the latter, with a contemptuous expression. "And as for baggage, a real trapper needs nothin' but his gun, huntin'-knife, and traps. Them men are slaves to their mules and packs. No, no! I couldn't think of such a life! Give me Flash, and this trusty weapon, and the sky for my roof, and the prairie for my floor, with nobody to dictate what I shall or shan't do, and I ask no more."

With this pithy epitome of his sentiments, Buckeye shouted "Hi, hi!" performed some difficult feats of horsemanship, then abating somewhat of his equestrian fury, joked the slow-paced brigade unmercifully, contrasting their encumbered march with his own untrammelled, unburdened movements. In Brion's estimation, there was too much truth in such badinage to make it altogether agreeable to the moderately-

moving party. Flash, in return, received criticisms not complimentary to himself or his master, but which were borne by the latter with perfect equanimity.

We cannot here make the reader acquainted with the various individuals of which the band was composed. There were French and half-breeds, a few of Mexican origin—the greater number being Americans from frontier towns. There was also a Texan adventurer, a Kentuckian, a Virginian, and a young fellow from Massachusetts. Many were veteran trappers, while some were fresh on the prairies, unpracticed in the arts and expedients of hunter life. Thus far on their march all had gone well. The Indians had not molested them; and grass being abundant, the horses and mules were in good condition. The young and unschooled in the kind of existence opening before them, feared they should reach the distant theatre of operations without incident or excitement, or adventures worth relating when they should again reach home; but the wiser heads shrugged their shoulders, intimating very plainly that danger might come before they were ready for it.

They passed Fort Laramie with nothing to break the monotony of their march. The jubilant spirits of the younger men began to flag; continued travel had already taken the first starch of greenness out of them. Seeing how smoothly things were proceeding, they grew less vigilant; ridiculed the precautions of Brion; wishing for an opportunity to "show the redskins what they could do," boasting in no measured terms their ability to teach them civility. Buckeye, who continued with the band, heard all this bravado in silence, feeling more inclined to feed their vanity than to rebuke their folly.

One morning, one of those who had been loudest in his threats, and had sneered most at the nightly cautions of Brion, was missed from camp. Believing that he would soon return, no uneasiness was felt on his account; but not making his appearance, several of his friends started to look for him. After a short search, his lifeless body was found a few rods from the encampment. It had no wound—no sign of mortal injury visible to casual eyes; yet the animating spirit had gone! The thoughtless braggarts at first were shocked, supposing their comrade had met his death by violence; but discovering no external hurt, they changed their minds, and concluded he had died a natural death.

"What do you call a natural death?" asked Buckeye.

A young Missourian, by the name of Headley, replied that he supposed apoplexy might be thus called.

"If it's apoplexy, then apoplexy's a catchin' disease, and more'n one of ye'll be down with it afore you reach the trappin' grounds," said Buckeye, mysteriously.

"You are not talking to boys, but to men?" retorted the Missourian, loftily.

"I'm glad you've told me, for I shouldn't have mistrusted it," was the instant rejoinder.

"It's plain enough to any one in his senses that this man died of a disease of the heart or brain. What else could kill him? I see no wounds or bruises, nor any signs of a struggle, and ye'll find it hard to crowd your mysterious nonsense down our throats in the way you think."

"Since you're so wise, it aint worth while to tell you anythin' more, because it might hurt ye. I've knowed folks to be injured by knowin' too much. An acquaintance of mine was 'bliged to take to his bed jest on account of his general information," answered Buckeye, with quiet sarcasm.

A grave was dug beneath a spreading poplar, in which the body was decently interred. The earth was smoothed, and a fire built over the spot, to prevent the resting-place of the mortal remains from being disturbed by the natives. During the day's march there was considerable discussion relative to the man's decease; but Brion, Buckeye, and a few others, studiously avoided the topic. The latter had already rendered himself unpopular by the singular opinion he had advanced relative to the subject. He had lost among a certain class who had previously been disposed to think highly of his wisdom and experience, that repute which he had gained for shrewdness among them. They doubted his mental soundness, regarding him as weak and superstitious. Where before his presence had been welcome, he was now met with coldness and ridicule. Sneers, covert jokes, and unfriendly innuendos, passed from mouth to mouth at his expense.

Such demonstrations the sturdy trapper did not deign to notice. He smoked his pipe calmly, conversed with the veterans of the brigade, praised the good qualities of Flash, and made occasional reconnoitering excursions in advance. It was remarked by the more observing, that Brion was more thoughtful and taciturn than usual, though they could very naturally attribute the fact to the circumstance of the recent death.

The next camp was chosen with particular care, and unwonted precautions were had in setting a guard. The latter, two in number, were relieved at midnight, when Headley and one of his friends took their places, with instructions to be vigilant. The Missourian heard Brion's orders with manifest impatience, and demanded to know if he supposed this was his first experience on the prairies of the West.

"You may have had some experience in the border towns," said the mountaineer, mildly; "but you have not yet grown gray with the vicissitudes of a hunter's life. You're in a region now where one hour is no type of what the next will be. Things unexpected happen here. There are seventy-four of us, well, and in fighting condition; but in the morning it isn't impossible that one may be missed from the number of his mess. I have known a band like this to be routed and scattered in a single night."

The Missourian turned his back upon Brion, and made no reply.

The following morning proved cloudy and dark, therefore favorable to repose; a circumstance of which the weary adventurers availed themselves by sleeping soundly to a later hour than they had been accustomed. Brion at length aroused them, and the camp was soon astir with active preparations for cooking. Headley was found sleeping near the fire, and being awakened by the clatter around him, assured Buckeye, with a sinister smile, that he had escaped the disease, called apoplexy, in a wonderful manner. The former glanced quickly over the groups of men, replying that he hoped it had fared as well with his comrades. Some one said:

"Let's ask him. Where is he?"

"Safe enough, I'll warrant," said Headley.

Several voices called to the party referred to. At that moment Brion came up to the group with a very grave face.

"Little good will it do to call him—he'll never answer to human call again!" he said, in a low, measured tone.

Every face was fixed on the partisan's in an instant.

"Billy Minten is gone!" he added.

"Gone where?" asked Headley.

"Where we're all going, my men—to the great nation of the dead!" he answered, sadly.

The Missourian's cheeks paled, while the hunters and trappers gazed at each other in silence. "His body lies yonder; he fell at his post. And perhaps," he continued, looking steadily at Headley, "some of you can tell what he died of?"

"A disease of the head or heart," muttered Buckeye, loud enough for Headley to hear.

Brion's men now gathered about the remains of the unfortunate young man, seeking vainly for the wound that sped him hence. Evidently he had fallen where he had last stood, stricken mortally, nor had moved a limb thereafter. His immortal part had been dismissed from his corporeal tabernacle without a struggle or painful contortion. The face was as calm as if he slept; his lips were closed, as were the eyes—expressing no dread, or horror, or consciousness of suffering; and the ghastliness of death was not written upon any of the features.

When this spectacle first presented, an interval of silence followed; which anon gave place to hurried queries no one could (or would) answer. Conjecture became rife, and speculation and hypothesis united to solve the mystery. Buckeye, Brion, and other veterans in woodcraft, stood aloof. Headley, who made pretensions to some knowledge of surgery, conducted the examination of the body, assisted by others of his sympathizers. Reluctantly he relinquished the search. Perfect obscurity covered the case; a truth he was loth to admit, for he prided himself on his perspicacity.

"Well, sir, what are your conclusions?" said the partisan, as Headley turned away, and passed where he was standing.

"There is no evidence that he died of violence—not the least. It is a puzzling case; but his sudden decease must be attributed to some hereditary predisposition to—"

A low laugh from Buckeye interrupted the speaker, and sent the blood to his face in a manner indicative of considerable excitement.

"Go on," said the partisan, quietly.

"Not another word!" exclaimed Headley. "Upon some people common-sense is thrown away, and sound reason, predicated on experience, is just so much Greek. Superstition and ignorance go together, sir!"

A slight smile curled Brion's lips for a moment, while Buckeye stroked his long beard and shrugged his shoulders, according to his habit.

"You decide, if I understand you, Mr. Headley, that Minten died by some lurking disease, which came to a sudden and fatal crisis last night?" resumed the partisan.

The Missourian bowed stiffly.

"You do not care to be explicit, I see?"

"Congestion of the brain, perhaps," replied Headley, ill-humoredly.

"Or perhaps some diffikilty about the heart," replied Buckeye, with affected humility.

Headley darted an angry look at the offender for nothing upset his mental equilibrium so quickly as doubting his knowledge, or ridiculing his opinions. He was specially infallible in his medical wisdom—his father having been a country doctor, with a large practice. Toward Buckeye, within the last two days, he had begun to entertain a positive dislike, which threatened to go on gathering strength until it became absolute enmity and hatred. The trapper's matter-of-fact assumption of superior skill in woodcraft had, in the first place, piqued him; then his obstinate refusal to bow to his judgment in the incomprehensible cases of which we have been treating, completed his antipathy. As we have taken care to impress it upon the courteous reader, the younger and less experienced portion of the band sympathized with Headley, while only the veterans appeared to occupy neutral ground. Naturally superstitious, some of the trappers were ready to believe that Heaven frowned on their enterprise, and was manifesting its disapproval by the visitations of death. Gloom and discouragement settled upon the countenances of such, and they resumed their march with a sullenness that boded little good to Brion's schemes.

CHAPTER II.

THE UNKNOWN YOUTH AGAIN APPEARS.

The party moved slowly on, Brion and Buckeye remaining behind, with two men, to see the body of Minten consigned to its kindred elements, and all traces of the grave obliterated, to prevent its subsequent exhumation by savage hands. The simple burial was soon completed. Buckeye was in the act of lighting the fagots that had been heaped on the spot by the partisan's order, when a horseman was descried approaching at a gallop. His hurried pace brought him quickly to the side of the mountaineer, who had observed his advance with a curiosity that could not be disguised. The rider was the slender youth who sought his lonely bivouac-fire on the banks of the Kansas.

Brion felt disposed to study the young stranger closely. He noticed that his chin was guileless of beard; his eyes large, vivacious and sparkling; his face dark, but comely. Although clad, as has before been stated, in befitting garb, his appearance was extremely neat, and Brion thought a trifle foppish. This idea was sustained somewhat by the fact that his feet and hands were small, the first encased in close-fitting moccasins, ornamented by Indian skill; the latter covered with gloves of soft leather, long enough to reach above the wrist, a third of the way to the elbow. His small, elegant rifle was fastened ingeniously to the saddle on the right side, in a manner to be instantly available when wanted. A brace of silver-mounted pistols peeped from holsters at the pommel, while the handle of a dagger flashed in the sun at his slight waist.

He sat on his horse with grace, and, therefore, with ease. And here we are brought naturally to speak of the qualities of the animal that bore the youthful rider. He was large and black as ebony, so that the mountaineer and trapper could not but admire his model proportions. Their attention was divided between the steed and his master; though too proud to confess, by outward manifestation, how much they were interested and puz-

zled, or, at least, not while the eyes of the youth were upon them.

"Good morning, messieurs," he said, with an accent not purely American, yet clear and distinct.

"Yes, it is a very good morning, but I should like it better were it less cloudy," answered the partisan, with more courtesy than on a former occasion.

"I suspect we ought to be pleased with everything Providence sends; not to be so, seems like finding fault with one with whose dispensations we have no right to meddle," was the immediate rejoinder.

"I confess, good youth, that your reasoning has the savor of truth. And I am now reminded that I am probably under some obligation to you. I found near me, on awakening the next morning after your visit, a dead serpent of a venomous kind, which was doubtless slain by your hand," added Brion.

"If that trifling act confers obligation, why, you are right. The creature was about to do you an injury; and, fortunately, it was in my power to dispatch him before he fixed his fangs."

"For which service I am deeply indebted. If my reception was not at that time entirely cordial, and mingled with distrust, I trust to atone for the same when opportunity shall present."

Brion spoke with some warmth, and bowed quite low; for the youth, despite his slight figure and smooth face, had an air that in some strange manner commanded respect.

The stranger's horse at that moment snuffed the air with affright, trembled, reared, and made a sidelong bound.

"Be quiet, Brave, be quiet. I see nothing to fear," said his master, soothingly.

"We have just buried a comrade here; it is the scent of death that terrifies him," said the partisan.

The young rider colored, and backed Brave from the spot.

"Did your friend find a natural death, or did he die by Indian hostility?" he inquired.

"Indeed, sir, I will request my more experienced companion to answer your question feeling confident that he will get nearer the truth."

"It seems to me that the matter is very simple. Certainly, the answer must be yes or no; in which case one must be entirely right or absolutely wrong."

"Ordinarily speakin', your ideas would be perfectly to the p'int; but in the partic'lar instance, you are wide the mark," said Buckeye.

"The cap'n has been pleased to refer to me; but my opinion, I dare say, wouldn't be worth much to ye. If it wouldn't be takin' too much liberty, I'd like to ask if your friends are far from here; for I take it you ain't alone, seein' you're young and inexperienced, as I may say?"

"I hope I have friends not far from me; it would make me wretched to believe to the contrary," was the evasive reply.

Prudential motives had clearly dictated Buckeye's query, and the youth appeared to comprehend his feelings.

"Being a stranger, you don't think it prudent to trust me; is it not so?"

"Well, I had such a notion, I confess," said the trapper.

"And I am too youthful in appearance to invite confidence? Come! be true to yourself! Have I not traced the workings of your mind?"

"If you never commit a greater blunder than that, you'll be a lucky lad," resumed Buckeye, with a characteristic motion of the shoulders. "But young heads," he added, "may be discreet, and a beard isn't allers necessary to make one shrewd; though judgin' by appearances, I should naterally conclude you ain't a veteran in woodcraft; and your frame is not calculated to endure the hardships and fatigues of this kind of life. It isn't my business, maybe, yet I'd advise ye, as a friend, to keep near your company."

"I'm obliged to you for your good-will, and will endeavor to take care of myself," was the good-natured reply. "I see you about to move on. I will bear you company at least for a time—to which proposal I trust you will have no objections," he added, in the same vein.

Brion felt a strong desire to know his new friend's name, purpose, and destination; but, notwithstanding his situation was one to make such interrogatories proper, he did not approach the subject without considerable em-

barrassment, that could not have escaped the observing eyes of the stranger.

"I presume," he began, "that the party to which you are attached seek these savage regions for the sake of excitement and novelty alone?"

"Your judgment is good, my friend."

The partisan, though dissatisfied with the reply, did not give up the pursuit.

"Is your band large, sir?" he resumed.

"Not very. I will remark, too, that their interest, I think, will not to any considerable extent conflict with yours. Be good enough to drop your suspicions, and permit me to see something of that generous confidence that I have heard distinguishes the roving trapper of the West. Had I been your enemy, I should have permitted that ugly serpent to finish his work. Come, messieurs, tell me what caused the death of your comrade, whose grave is on the prairie, like a sailor's in the sea?"

These words were spoken with an ingenuous frankness that, for the time being, dispelled distrust from the mind of the mountaineer. Looking at the lad's frank face, he could not resist the convictions that his intentions were friendly, his mind void of hypocrisy.

"Forgive my reserve, good youth," said the partisan, with unaffected earnestness, pausing, and extending his hand. "The life that I am at present following is one to make me distrustful of my fellows; and seal up the warm fountains of the heart. Know, young sir, that I am the leader of an enterprise that stirs up the bitterest feelings of rivalry in certain quarters—a rivalry full of all manner of subtlety and hostility. It has not long been thus, for you must understand that I have, until recently, been no man's servant, nor tied to other interest than my own. I have been a free trapper, consulting the stars and my own convictions to govern my course; but since I accepted this leadership, I am another man. My eyes have to be in all directions. I am, in truth, a sort of a watch-dog to guard the property of others; and, like that noble animal, shall be prized according to my faithfulness, and the acuteness of my instincts. So much for my apparent churlishness and reserve—an explanation I have not before deigned to make even to the honest man you see at my side."

"No more, I beg of you! I know that you are the soul of generosity and honor; otherwise, the language of the face is false in its utterance."

This flattering avowal had something more than the mere wording to commend it to the partisan; the tones went directly to that spot where human friendship begins. A sense of satisfaction accompanied the youth's speech into Brion's ears, and the last lingering fragment of contempt said adieu. He straightened his figure in the saddle, and seemed ten years younger with his handsome face, free from lurking doubt, and his lips smiling through his dark beard.

"You do me too much credit, I assure you," he answered, in a genial voice, which caused the stripling to regard him with deepening attention. "But we will not dwell upon this matter longer. Common courtesy touches my elbow, reminding me that the civil question proposed by you has not been answered. You wish to know the cause of our associate's sudden decease. Let me inform you that I have buried two of our men within forty-eight hours, who bore on their persons no visible signs of violence. Various conjectures are formed in regard to the subject, the prevailing sentiment being, I think, that both died of a disease of the heart or brain. My friend Buckeye will not hesitate, I expect, to speak his mind fully and freely, and give us both the benefit of his sound judgment and experience."

The trapper mused, then looked inquiringly at the partisan, to see how far his expression invited or warranted confidence; that individual nodded to the mute interrogatory, but still Buckeye remained silent, with his eyes cast downward to the pommel of his saddle, or fixed upon the youth at his side, whose large horse bore him like a feather, apparently proud of his own strength.

"If I was to speak the truth like an honest man, as is becoming to me and all others. I should assert confidently that the two men had foul play. I'm aware how it'll seem to them that don't know what I do, and never heard the name of Redpath."

The youth turned an eager, searching look on the trapper.

"Stop, my friend," he said, "and allow me

to interrupt you by asking, who is Redpath?"

"Ask anything you please, sir—ask what makes the grass grow, or the heart beat, or the sun shine? Such questions might be commonplace enough, and under some circumstances not doubt very proper; but answering them is another affair."

"You mean to say that Redpath is a mysterious personage, whom you know only by his deeds, or what is more probable, by hearsay."

"Hearsay comes very near to it, but don't quite cover the whole ground. I have seen effects that were attributed to the one I named, by those who had more knowledge of him than I. Redpath is the enemy of the white man, the sworn foe of the trapper and hunter. Where are his haunts, and what does he look like, will be asked? He is in the lonely defiles, on the mountains, in the forests, upon the wide prairies. He is one as gives no warning of his approach. He comes and goes with the speed of an eagle on the wing; makes a swoop, strikes the pale face with the shaft of death, and is away. He can't be trailed, he can't be followed, he can't be brought within the range of the double sights. He finds a band like the cap'n's; he dogs it, he hangs upon it in the front, in the rear; yet nobody knows where he is, or what brings death upon 'em, or what power directs the hidden bolt. Where did I hear all this? you'll next want to know. By the dim watch-fires of the wandering hunter, in the camp of the trapper, from the mouths of old voyagers, from the lips of fearless adventurers, daring mountaineers, and in the wigwams of friendly Indians."

The cheeks of the unknown youth grew pale, and the partisan's brow wore a sombre expression during Buckeye's singular recital. He first observed them both attentively, as if to satisfy himself of the sincerity of one, and to learn how much of the incredible tale was credited by the other, who had the prestige of a strong mind above the vagaries of superstition.

"What is your opinion of all this?" the stranger asked, addressing Brion.

The latter colored, and appeared disposed to evade the home question, afraid either of being accused of weakness, or shrinking from speaking his honest convictions. His confusion did not pass unnoticed.

"I am ready to confess that I have often heard the name of Redpath up in the mountain yonder. The trappers were wont to talk of him in low tones over their night-fires and buffalo-humps. He is supposed to be a bold and cunning savage, of great personal strength, who spends his life in avenging some real or fancied wrong. That his doings are exaggerated, is very probable, and yet the being called Redpath is dangerous. You may consider him fabulous; you may even smile at my seriousness, and pity my credulity."

"And so you conclude Redpath slew your men?"

There was a trifle of irony in the stranger's tones that did not escape Brion's notice.

"I have not yet admitted that, I believe."

"It was I who affirmed it," said Buckeye.

"One admission which you made, you have evidently forgotten; you stated clearly that there were no marks of violence on the bodies?"

Buckeye was embarrassed by the cross-questioning of his new acquaintance; to gain time as well as to hide his momentary confusion, he helped himself to a generous quid of tobacco. Like most men, he was afraid of ridicule; and that, in fact, was about the only thing he feared in the world.

"I know it has a curious look at first, but a fact is a fact, and nothin' can change it. You see he has the knack of doin' it in a strange way."

"I should think so."

"I reckon it won't make no great difference what you think!" retorted Buckeye, frowning.

"Not the slightest; but it is a very mysterious tale you have been telling, and you must pardon a little natural doubt on my part. If you scowl thus, I shall leave you."

The trapper said to himself, "It won't be a great loss."

"A story, after making the circuit of the Rocky Mountains, must necessarily be full grown when it gets here," the unknown added.

"And I dare say you'll get to be a man when you have gone half that distance!" Buckeye rejoined, with a spice of sarcasm.

It was now the youth's turn to be confused; he reddened to the eye-brows, while the trapper congratulated himself on his lucky hit.

"Be steady, Brave," said the youth; an admonition seemingly quite useless, as Brave was at that instant as docile as he could possibly be.

"To be killed," suddenly resumed the young man, rallying "one must inevitably receive injuries of some kind—either wounds or bruises—something to leave tangible marks upon the person. Tell me, now, is there not some reason in this logic?"

"Oh, too much," replied Buckeye, sullenly.

"Pardon, sir," continued the other, addressing Brion, "you have interested me very much in this wonderful relation. Really, do you believe in this savage vampire—this *Gian Ben Gux* of the prairies?"

"No more than what I am constrained to. We may injure ourselves as much by believing too little as in believing too much. Danger that is apprehended is, in a measure, guarded against. Though young in years, your intelligent face assures me that you understand the force of my last remark."

"Do you fear this inexplicable enemy of the pale faces?"

Whatever fault this question might have, it did not lack explicitness. The hot blood flew to Brion's face in an instant, and he turned a proud, rebuking face upon the questioner.

"Your extreme youthfulness," he said, with dignified severity, "induces me to overlook the—the—impertinence of your question."

"I have offended."

"And I have forgiven."

"Thanks!"

"Speak no more of it. I shall be cautious, but not cowardly. I hate cowardice—it is a species of meanness indicative of a pitiful spirit. This worthy trapper has spoken of Redpath—a personage either real or imaginary—and he has expressed his opinion freely. Not so have I. If such an one exists, it is my fixed purpose to know more of him—to unmask him—to discover if he really pursues white men with the malignity and secrecy with which the tongue of mountain rumor has charged him. I own that I have my doubts, and certain circumstances stagger and perplex me. My camp in future shall be on the alert; a prairie dog shall not be able to pass it unseen. Our enemies shall know what it is to outwit a veteran mountaineer."

Buckeye glanced at the partisan with an air of pride and satisfaction; it pleased him to reflect that such a brave, well spoken man was a brother trapper. "He cried: 'Hi, hi!' to Flash, causing him to shoot ahead of his companions like an arrow. Brave laid his ears back, offended that another animal should have the audacity to pass him. Buckeye's exhilaration soon expended itself, and he allowed Brion to come up with him."

"Your horse has excellent qualities I'm sure," the young man remarked, as Buckeye resumed his former place.

"He hasn't no equal between this and the Pacific, I reckon—no superior, sartin'!"

"Sagacious and intelligent, without doubt. You call him Flash on account of his speed, perhaps?"

"Jest for that reason, mister, and no other. He isn't so fat and sleek as some hoss-flesh I've seen; but, when there's need, I know pretty near where to find him. Flash has a few tricks, too, that I've learned him, e'en most human."

Brion glanced at the stranger youth at that moment, and perceived that he was looking at the hatchet that he had taken from the tree in the manner described, and which he had carried ever since at his side or his saddle-bow. Seeing that the partisan had detected the direction of his gaze, he appeared disconcerted and instantly turned his attention another way. The mountaineer was sagacious, and quick to observe, and the circumstance, slight as it was, did not pass unnoted. A train of novel ideas began thereupon to whirl through his brain; he seemed trying to work out some kind of a problem, without being able to find the proper data from which to start. Buckeye contrived to touch him on the arm, giving him a warning look, that said: "Cap'n, I'm very suspicious of this little feller."

But a change had come over the partisan—the signs of the trapper were unheeded; he rode on, singularly taciturn and reflective.

"Look, comrade, there's a horseman away yonder, and he's making signals!" exclaimed Buckeye, pointing toward the mountains.

"I thank you for your company, brave knights of the rifle and trap. Adieu, mes-sieurs, adieu!"

With a neigh of joy, Brave recognized the

signal to go, and sprang away with a force that made the ground tremble.

"A spy!" cried the trapper, vehemently. "Say but the word, cap'n, and I'll follow and bring the young scamp back!"

"Do no such thing!" said Brion, earnestly. "And what you propose is impracticable. See how he rides! Ah, my friend, you might as well chase the wind!"

Buckeye gazed after the black horse and his rider with both vexation and admiration—vexed he hardly knew for what, and admiring because of the swiftness of the steed. He shook his wise head dubiously, wondering how such a silken sort of lad got so far from home, and what he was good for. Small hands and feet, a slight frame, neatly-fitting garments, a smooth and comely face, were irreconcilable with his notions of woodcraft.

"I have a secret," he said, at length.

"Well?"

"It is worth knowin'."

"I should like to hear it."

"But to-day I won't tell you. Do you know it isn't a lucky day to tell a secret? You don't, of course—I see it by your expression."

"You excite my curiosity, much. When shall I have your confidence?"

"To-morrow, like enough; we shall see. But here is the rear of your lazy fellows, and the very first man of them is that conceited coxcomb, Headley! I can't tolerate him, so I'll leave you; but I'll stroll into your camp before the moon is up to-night."

The trapper urged Flash to a gallop, and bounded along the almost interminable reach of prairie. His stout figure was soon but a mere speck between the plain and the horizon, still growing less and less to the eyes that followed him.

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH BELLMAR AND MARIOT APPEAR.

It is needful that we make a retrograde movement, that the next advance in the line of march of our story may be more orderly and intelligible to those so obliging as to follow us in our roving in the distant West.

Ambrose Bellmar and Pierre Mariot were residents of Westport, and partners in the fur trade, annually sending forth a brigade of trappers. The first was an elderly man, the father of a daughter who had attained to seventeen years, as well as to a degree of beauty exceedingly rare, save in the pages of romance. Pierre Mariot was the son of Jules Mariot, Monsieur Bellmar's late partner, deceased. The young man had been admitted to the house of "Bellmar and Mariot," partly on account of the friendship that Bellmar had entertained for his father, and partly because he did not wish the latter's funds withdrawn from the enterprise at a time when there was a heavy pressure in the money-market. M. Bellmar might have had other schemes in his mind, of which we may presently speak.

Pierre entered keenly into the rivalry of the trade, with fewer conscientious scruples than his predecessor. To the senior partner's credit be it written, that he had more of that which men term principle, than the junior; but Mr. Bellmar, or Monsieur Bellmar—for he was a Frenchman—was avaricious, possessed of a restless, insatiate spirit of gain, which led him on step by step, encouraged by Pierre, to many acts that he feared would trouble him on his death-bed. The new fur company had injured his business; there had been a perceptible decline in his income since its organization. Such a state of things alarmed his cupidity, stimulating him to devise means to checkmate his competitors, and turn the stream of gold once more into his coffers. Strategy he had always encouraged and rewarded, when successful among his employes; but, since the new association had secured the services of Ben Brion as leader of the trapping operations, he was aware that ordinary art would fail; therefore, something out of the common order must be done, or the trade would languish, and he, perhaps, be driven, ultimately, entirely from the field that he had occupied so long, and gleaned his wealth from. Pierre Mariot, who had also heard the note of warning which this arrangement had sounded, gave evidence that he would set himself at work in earnest.

Mignon—Bellmar's daughter—was one day in the library, amusing herself, as she was wont, with her good companions, the books. She heard her father approaching, accom-

panied by Mariot, whose voice always admonished her of his proximity. There was a small apartment beyond, and into that Mignon went, closing the door. By the time she was seated, ready to resume her reading, Bellmar and Pierre reached the library. Mademoiselle Mignon observed that something very unusual took place, viz.: Mariot shut the door and locked it, after which she heard him draw a chair near the writing-desk where her father invariably sat. Mignon did not like her position. She was forced to be a listener, provided they conversed in their natural tones, there being no mode of egress save through the apartment taken possession of.

"You are aware, Monsieur Bellmar, that this confounded fur company, that has given us so much uneasiness, has engaged Ben Brion for its leader? Brion, you will remember, is the man whose services we tried to secure?"

"Yes—the disagreeable news has reached me. I perceive that our business will sustain a severer check than ever, Monsieur Mariot."

"Can you doubt it? Something must be done," said Pierre.

"*Ma foi!* we have not ceased to do something ever since these unlucky rival companies existed. What new expedient remains?"

"That is a point to be settled by us, and without delay."

"Ah, my friend, common strategy will not do with Ben Brion."

"Who knows that better than I? It is for that very reason that we must take measures bold and energetic."

M. Bellmar mused.

"We are quite alone, I suppose?" Mariot added.

Mignon, who sat directly opposite the key-hole of the door, was now listening with eager interest, and without a single feeling of compunction.

"Entirely alone," replied Bellmar.

"We must ruin the American Fur Company!" with emphasis on the word "ruin."

"Be good enough to tell me how? My strategical resources are exhausted."

"We must break up and disorganize the party under Brion."

"You are just as far from the question, Monsieur Mariot. You do not inform me how this is to be accomplished."

"By means that may perchance startle you!"

Mignon shuddered, knowing that something terrible was in Mariot's mind; she knew by the tones of his voice.

"We must keep the penalties of the law in view," quoth Bellmar, wriggling in his chair.

"Law does not reach beyond Fort Leavenworth. We will employ instruments that laugh at the word law."

"Indians?"

Mignon made a slight movement.

"What was that?" asked Pierre.

"Nothing; go on; you would, you say, employ savages—at least, you mean so to be understood?"

"Yes; our enemies—they who take from me my business, are my enemies—must be awed, shocked, stunned, scattered, the survivors driven from the trapping-grounds like trembling sheep."

Mariot pronounced these words with startling energy, stamping angrily upon the floor.

"There is much evil in that man," thought Mignon.

"Proceed," said the senior.

"I have told you all."

"*Foudre!*" exclaimed Bellmar, impatiently.

"You have told me nothing!"

"Leave the ways and means to me, and you will have naught to regret."

Monsieur Bellmar rose and paced the floor.

"I shrink from acts of hostility," he added.

"I shrink from losing my invested capital," retorted Mariot, in a hard, dry tone, in which self was uppermost.

"Such things lie heavy on one's conscience as one grows old, Pierre," retorted Bellmar, in a deprecating way.

"It would grieve me to be obliged to withdraw my capital, and dissolve the old and respectable house of Bellmar and Mariot."

"It would be a sad blow to a man of my years, wanting, as I do, your youthfulness and energy."

"Will you abandon this to me?"

"*Nous verrons!*"

"Delay will baffle my purpose; accede at once."

"You will send agents?"

"Doubtless."

"Perhaps go yourself?"

"It is possible."

"And it will cost?"

"A thousand dollars."

"So much?"

"The benefits will be tenfold. That company annihilated, we go on again as in old times, when my father lived."

"What do you propose in relation to Brion?"

"Pardon, monsieur, but I will not worry you with details. You consent?"

"You will be careful of human life? Blood on your conscience will prove a burden."

"Do not be uneasy. I will play my hand skillfully; but remember that I do not promise to do mischief!"

"Well, Mariot, be discreet, and spend money to advantage. By-the-way, I have received a letter from our Indian agent, Fournier, which I will show you. It is in my pocket—no, it is in a coat that I took off yesterday. I will go for it."

"Bellmar is getting into his dotage; he is too weak, too weak!" muttered Mariot, the moment the senior left the room. "He wishes for a plan of the campaign, but I am not so stupid as to show my order of battle; it would strike him dumb, his nerves are so shattered."

"Ah!" said Mignon to herself, "you do not know who heard that remark."

"Once in receipt of my plan, he would soon betray all to Mignon. Mignon is timid, and her conscience is as sensitive to evil as mercury to the changes of temperature."

"Astute Pierre Mariot!" thought Mademoiselle Bellmar.

The senior returned with the letter, which treated, in the main, of affairs of no interest to the reader; in it, however, occurred this curious passage: "The trappers and hunters, who are daily arriving at the trading-house, have much to say about that mysterious personage whom I referred to in a former letter. He is supposed, by many, to be a celebrated Blackfoot chief, that bears mortal enmity to all whose faces are white. Would it not be lucky if he should cross the trail of the new company, and give them a taste of his quality? I am endeavoring to cultivate friendly relations with the Blackfeet, with a fair prospect of success. I think it would be well to send out a fresh stock of Indian finery by your next brigade, such as glass beads, ribbons, pipes. Also, a lot of hunting-knives and cheap guns. But do not be too sanguine about the Blackfeet—they are a wily, cruel, intractable race in every particular, differing from their neighbors, the Nez Percés, who are a harmless, honest people, on whom we can rely in all pertaining to legitimate trade, but who cannot easily be induced to act against other companies in turning the tide of traffic to our interest."

"Do you know much of this redoubtable native to which Fournier alludes?" Mariot inquired, with an earnestness that he regretted a moment after.

"By common camp-gossip only; a species of information not very reliable, friend Pierre," was the response.

"Is he not a being purely of the imagination, think you—a sort of bugbear, created by some vagrant adventurer, to put tongues in motion that had been too long silent to be particular?"

"It may be thus; but it is scarcely probable. Mountaineers are shrewd, and the American free-trapper has sense, and always understands what he's about."

"Do the Americans also talk of Redpath?"

"Yes, *mon ami*. I conversed with one Buckeye, a genuine type of the free-trapper class, that has a firm belief in such a personage."

"Well, there is nothing marvellous in the fact that an Indian chief should be revengeful—spurred on, as he may be, by a burning sense of wrong."

"It is not that which excites alarm; it is the manner of his vengeance, the terrible mystery that hangs over his movement, his wondrous silence and secrecy, his astonishing power of eluding pursuit, his fearful perseverance."

"You speak earnestly, Monsieur Bellmar."

"Not earnestly, but to the point."

And then the senior added:

"Our rivals are making strong efforts to fill up their brigade. They will soon be ready for the Western trail."

"I must be three weeks in advance of them; that is, my agent must. I will dog them with such influences—"

"Go on, sir."

"As—as shall greatly surprise them," he resumed, in a voice much modified, and with a smile.

"This is a quiet place to make confidential arrangements," he continued, looking about him with a satisfied air. "I may wish to be closeted here at this hour to-morrow, to confer with some good friends of ours. And now I think I am commissioned to look after our own mutual interests. It is getting late—I must meet an appointment."

The parties arose and left the library, while Mignon remained in her chair, like one very much startled and confounded. She had satisfied herself long before that Pierre Mariot was a man of a low standard of morality, but she was not prepared to believe him so much a villain as he had proved himself. He was meditating crime—scheming the ruin of others—planning deeds of blood—drawing her father into the vortex of his evil mind. Ah! Mariot, your last virtue and your last chance faded from the heart of Mignon that morning. She scorned, she despised you, when you left the house, full of dark devices for the overthrow of your brother man!

Mignon went to the window, the only one in the room, and which fronted the street. The sash was raised a little. Mariot and her father had reached the hall door, and the former was upon the steps, when she heard him remark:

"Here comes Brion!"

Mademoiselle Bellmar cast her eyes down the street, he saw a man on horseback. He was mounted on a stout, bay animal that carried himself proudly, like a trained horse on parade. The presentation was striking, calculated to impress one with the majesty of the human figure, the noble strength and spirit of the horse, and the dignity of both were gracefully united.

"How noble!" exclaimed Mignon, enthusiastically, then blushing at her warmth, she drew back.

Brion sat firmly and erect, his stalwart proportions seeming a portion of his glorious steed, his left hand grasping the rein, his right at rest by his side, his face a-glow, his bold eyes full of animation.

"A fine picture. Oh, Pierre Mariot, if you could only look like that!" soliloquized Mignon. "But that is impossible; only a noble nature can look noble."

"He reminds one of the gallant cavaliers of the old school," she heard her father say. Brion was now opposite the house; he raised his eyes to the window and saw Mignon. She was charming; and the gaze he thus unwillingly surprised, thrilled him, and made him blush like a school-girl convicted of a misdemeanor. Familiarity with Nature in her simplest and yet grandest form of development had not blunted Brion's susceptibility to those delightful emotions which the presence of a lovely woman inspires. For a second, an appreciative space of time to the soul—the mountaineer was dazzled, and at a loss; then he recovered his self-possession, and bowed like a Knight Templar.

Mignon ran from the window in a strange flutter of excitement, and the sound of clattering hoofs followed her to her chamber.

O Mignon! lost and won in a single day!

Three individuals answering to the appellatives of Grenier, Kincaid, and Gardette, were seated upon a bench not far from the establishment of Bellmar & Mariot. The first was a German, the second a Frenchman, the third a half-breed. Grenier was despairing, Kincaid angry, Gardette sullen, and all were hungry. They belonged to the lazier, less efficient, and most unscrupulous of the mountaineers. Their present possessions were meagre, having nothing about them but bad reputations, which they had richly earned, and were in a fair way to keep. They had offered their services to various fur companies without success, their characters for good-for-nothings being pretty extensively known and appreciated.

The three unworthies had been about Westport, more or less drunken for the last three weeks, during which time they had created a feeling of universal dislike, not unfrequently insulting the wives and daughters of respectable citizens, besides committing various thefts to gain the means, probably, of continuing their debauch. Their resources, as well as the patience of the inhabitants, were at length exhausted; they were warned to leave the place within four-and-twenty hours, under the dire penalty of a coat of tar and feathers—a garment dreaded alike by every class of the genus

hemo. The short period of grace allowed them would expire in the morning; but there were serious obstacles in the way of their departure. Let it be understood that they had no horses, no arms, nor anything like a proper outfit for the mountains. They could have dispensed with the first, had they been provided with the second; but guns and ammunition were essential necessities, without which they would starve upon the trail. They realized the dilemma into which they had fallen, and were combining their remaining wits to surmount the difficulties that beset them. Various projects had been discussed, but all in turn rejected, either as impracticable, or unadapted to the emergency; hence their gloomy visages.

"Monsieur Mariot comes this way," said Kincaid whose anger-inflamed eyes chanced to be turned to the storehouse of Bellmar & Mariot.

"Let him come," retorted Grenier, in a melancholy tone.

"Let us hold a knife to his throat till he hire us," proposed the former.

"That's a fool's advice!" affirmed Grenier.

"You're always grumbling!" quoth Kincaid.

"Let us go to the Indians!" said Gardette.

"And have our scalps taken off," added Kincaid, spitefully.

"Bestill. Mariot has something to say to us. I know by the way he looks and walks," said Grenier.

Pierre Mariot approached the trio with a mien so guarded that it was impossible for the parties to divine whether his coming boded good or evil.

"Well, messieurs, when do you start for the mountains?" he asked.

Grenier held his tongue; the half-breed turned his back to the questioner, and Kincaid said, in a defiant voice:

"When we get ready, monsieur!"

"Ah, I see! you're waiting for an outfit," returned Mariot, in a tone that at once reminded Kincaid of the tar and feathers in reserve; he clenched his fist, and scowled ominously.

"You'll do well to keep your jests at home!" he gruffly retorted.

"You are in execrable temper, my good fellow. What will you wager that I will not make you more amiable before I leave you?"

"You'd better go about your business!" said Kincaid, perversely.

"Be reasonable, and don't destroy the only chance left you; it lays between starvation and feathers, as it is now; but I can set you right again, if I will."

"We tried you, and you refused us—hiring green hands in preference; that is why I advise you to leave us."

"But if I have changed my mind?"

"Why, then, speak out, and we'll hear you."

"You are acquainted with the country?"

"I know every yard of it from here to Columbia River. I have starved in the Wind River Range, feasted at the Yellow Stone, frozen on the Salmon Mountain, and thawed at Walla-Walla. So have my comrades," asserted the Frenchman, confidently.

"Are you on friendly footing with many of the Indian tribes?"

"With nearly all of them."

"And can speak their language, I suppose?"

"As well as my mother tongue."

"I want men who combine shrewdness, energy, and courage, with other qualities."

"We have all the qualities you want, monsieur," said Kincaid, modestly.

"I wish you to act as my agents. I shall pay you liberally, providing you enter into my service with zeal."

"Agents, Monsieur Mariot!" exclaimed Grenier.

"Agents in reality, if not openly. You know there are rival bands in the field?"

"I get a little light, monsieur."

"I shall supply you with horses and all that you need. This is no place to give you instructions, neither is our office; therefore you will meet me at Bellmar's, where we can talk confidently, for you must know that this is a matter of great importance and secrecy."

"We'll be there, but our engagements won't admit of much delay, monsieur," said Kincaid, with a knowing leer.

"I am aware of it!" Mariot answered, with a smile. "And now promise me that if I pay you a few dollars in advance, you will not go and get so drunk that you will not be able to comprehend what you will be required to do."

"Oh, sir, as if that were possible!" said Grenier, innocently, casting at the same moment a meaning glance at his associates.

"You are trusty as steel itself, I've no doubt; so here is what will put different faces on you."

"That has the complexion of silver, I really believe," said Kincaid.

Mariot having said all that he deemed of any consequence, left the mountaineers to reflect on the happy turn of circumstances.

"You may be sure something wicked is to be done," said the Frenchman, the moment Pierre was out of hearing.

"Cunning and bad," quoth Gardette.

"Our consciences are tender," Kincaid added, with mock sanctimoniousness.

"And obliging to a weakness," said Grenier.

"Therefore should be strengthened by internal applications. Come, mountaineers, remember we are to act civilly and morally, and not make brutes of ourselves. Only think that Mariot could for one instant imagine we should get drunk! *Foudre!* were ever men so wronged?" cried Kincaid, in better temper.

CHAPTER IV.

MARIOT MEETS WITH DISAPPOINTMENT.

It was nearly dark. Mignon was returning home from a long walk. She had chosen an unfrequented path that she might reflect without interruption, having much to think of seriously. She found herself placed in an awkward position in regard to Pierre Mariot, and it was of that she was meditating. Voices and boisterous laughter reached her ears, assuring her that persons were near; indeed, two men were already in sight, and presently a third joined them. Mignon would gladly have evaded them had it been possible; but that was out of the question, there being no other road, and they close at hand. She went forward unhesitatingly, with what resolution she could command, not even raising her eyes to the faces of the ill-mannered trio, one of whom placed himself so as to obstruct the way. Rude jests assailed Mignon; she was alarmed.

"If the people of the town threaten us, to repay them we will insult their daughters," said one, staggering toward Mademoiselle Bellmar.

"Tis no more than just," cried a second.

"Hush, she is pale—she will faint!" added the third, sneeringly.

"Oh, how delicate you are, miss. And what pretty goods you wear! Dear me, not so fast, now; you will deprive us of your company too soon," resumed he who had first spoken, in the slow, thick utterance of a drunken man.

"Oh, you are a great deal better than poor fellows like us. But it is such as we who make your townsmen rich, and we get for it only threats and bad words."

Mignon recoiled with a cry of terror, for one of the villains had the insolence to grasp her arm, employing language that made her cheeks redden with shame and indignation. She had the presence of mind to cry for assistance; and it came promptly and resolutely. A man whose eyes seemed to emit lightning, scattered the insulters, and supported Mignon. His presence was a Gibraltar of strength to Mignon—there was such noble determination in his face, such manliness in his shapely figure. She recognized the horseman who had ridden so gallantly—Ben Brion, the mountaineer whose name had been mentioned by Mariot.

Mademoiselle was so pretty, so engaging in her deportment, so graceful and warm in the expression of her gratitude, that the partisan sighed when he left her, regretting that his calling would so soon take him from Westport, from the vicinage of the only woman who had ever quickened the pulsations of his honest heart.

Pierre Mariot had a long conversation with Grenier, Kincaid, and Gardette, at the time appointed. Miss Bellmar was as punctual as he, believing it not an act of meanness to hear the development of a nefarious scheme for the injury of those pursuing a lawful and honorable business.

It would not be edifying to the reader to state all that was said in detail; a few of the most important points will be touched upon.

"I think you told me," messieurs mountaineers," said Pierre, graciously, "that your engagement would compel you to leave Westport at an early hour to-day?"

"We have but an hour's grace, monsieur; and then the *canaille* of this accursed place will be upon us," replied Kincaid, who acted as spokesman for his comrades.

"Not the *canaille* alone, worthy hunter; for the more respectable townsmen are much exasperated at your free-and-easy manners. I fear you have acted scandalously, but that is no business of mine; it deranges my plans a little, but I can get along. Now, we will to the matter in hand. I hope you are sober enough to comprehend?"

Mariot assumed a different tone and bearing; he spoke firmly, determinedly, and rapidly, keeping his keenly penetrating eyes fixed steadily upon his listeners.

"I want men that can act discreetly—not those who can only get drunk and act the braggart and brawler. If I employ you, and pay you, you must do my bidding to the letter, and without useless questioning. I know that you are not scrupulous. Keep silent; if you were honest men, you would not do for me; and if you flatter yourselves that you are such, you have only to walk out of the house; for in that case our negotiations will stop at once. I want subtle—"

"Oh monsieur, I trust you were not going to say knaves!" interrupted Kincaid.

Three subtle fellows, willing to earn their money according to the wishes of their employer. Now, hear my plan. You are to start this very day, for I wish you to be some weeks in advance of the band about to be sent out by the American Fur Company, of which Brion is captain. Your business will be to vex, annoy, mislead, deceive, undermine, injure, and if possible, annihilate the rival enterprise. You are to operate upon the Indians by truth or falsehood—just which will best serve your purpose, and by presents. You will sour the minds of those disposed to be friendly, and excite to a greater degree the enmity of those already hostile to white men. With all your knowledge of savages, you will have no trouble in effecting this. Are you understanding me, messieurs?"

The parties signified that they were.

"In your roving over the mountains, you have doubtless heard the name of Redpath. Come, tell me the truth—is there, or is there not such a being?"

The sun-browned face of Kincaid grew a shade whiter; he took his own time to reply, speaking slowly, and with less assurance.

"Redpath is as real as you or I, or Gardette, or Grenier, or anybody that lives."

"There, you are serious now. And, *ma fois*, your lips are pale. I see that you are not above the weakness of superstition. Are the deeds of this red scarecrow dark and terrible?"

"To those whom he devotes to his vengeance, yes. But we never talk much of him when the other side of the South Pass; at least, myself and companions don't; he is apt to be near when talked of. We breathe his name in a whisper on the trapping grounds, especially at night, when our fires are lighted."

"Is it during the night time only, that he strikes his victims?"

"At all times and seasons, monsieur."

"And is it true," continued Mariot, sinking his voice, "that he kills without leaving the sign of violence on the body?"

"So it is rumored, but I have heard that it is not always the case. But why do you question me?"

"If you are quick at catching an idea, you have already surmised. If there is such a character as Redpath, I wish to unloose him, like a fierce bloodhound, on the trail of Brion's band."

"Ah, monsieur, who will risk his scalp to put him on the scent?" exclaimed Grenier, with a shudder.

"He is said to be a Blackfoot!"

"Yes," responded Kincaid.

"And the Blackfeet—"

"Are the pests and terror of the trappers," the former added.

"But Gardette," said Grenier, and then stopped, looking inquiringly at the half-breed.

"Gardette," repeated Pierre.

"Has lived with them and speaks the Blackfoot language," added Kincaid.

"Then he can unchain the hound!" resumed Mariot, calmly.

"But that, you know, would result in loss of life, monsieur."

"What do you think, my good fellow?" Mariot inquired, turning to Gardette.

"I prefer to have as little to do with Redpath as possible."

Pierre Mariot slipped some money into the half-breed's hand, saying:

"But you will see if the thing can be done?"

Gardette nodded.

"Let it be so understood; and if you are successful, you shall receive—"

The rest of the communication was whispered, and Mignon did not hear it.

"We must be off," said Grenier.

"Go to Fort Leavenworth, and your horses and outfit shall be sent after you. I will go myself to give you further instructions. Do you respectively agree to carry out the spirit of my wishes?"

"We do; we will do our best, or rather our worst. We are yours."

"Everything shall be prepared without delay. So begone, if you would save the suit the inhabitants promised you."

The conference broke up, leaving Mignon to make what use she pleased of that which she had heard, and to think what she might of the character of Pierre. She both loathed and pitied the man that could deliberately plan the destruction of human life. She met him an hour afterward, pale but calm. His features were softened by smiles of affected gaiety—he studied to assume his most agreeable phases and phrases. His playfulness might have been amusing had it been sincere. Mignon permitted him to exhaust his pleasantries with an appearance of complaisance quite at variance with her feelings, well knowing there was something more serious behind Monsieur Mariot's good humor. He grew sentimental and graciously grave—indications that he was nearing the point.

"In view of our approaching marriage," he began.

"What did you say, sir?" asked Mignon.

"I was going to observe, that in view of our approaching marriage—"

"Marriage, Monsieur Mariot? Did you not say marriage?"

"That air was charmingly put on, Mignon! Yes, I said the word you have repeated with so much emphasis."

"Please allow me to inquire to what parties the word 'our' is intended to apply?"

"To your charming self and your humble servant, Pierre Mariot," he returned, bowing.

"That is news indeed! How facetious you are to-day. I have not seen you so amusing for a long time."

"It is you who are facetious, it seems to me, Mademoiselle Bellmar. Your father and I conversed seriously on this subject last night; he agrees with me that farther procrastination is unnecessary. You are aware that it was the intention of our parents that we should be united when of a proper age. Such a compact was made when we were but children. I think my attentions to you have been of a character not to be misunderstood. I believed that my advances were received as they were intended; that your own sympathies as well as the wishes of your father were in my favor, leading you naturally to expect that the day of our union must be near at hand; it has often been referred to by me in your hearing, as an event long calculated upon."

"Monsieur Mariot, I know nothing of a marriage to take place between you and I," said Mignon, calmly.

"Mignon, you jest with such a serious air that you alarm me!" exclaimed Pierre, turning very pale.

"Be assured there will be no marriage between us," she added, in the same tone.

"You positively alarm me. Your manner is really chilling. Do you mean to be understood that all is at end between us?"

"I simply mean to say that I shall never marry you, Monsieur Mariot."

"Mademoiselle Bellmar?"

"Am I sufficiently plain in my speech to be apprehended?"

"You are cruelly plain if you are in earnest," he replied.

"I never was, and never expect to be more in earnest than at this moment. You are to receive this decision as final."

"Oh, I cannot believe this—it is too unexpected," cried Mariot, in a hoarse voice.

"Your vanity led you to expect nothing but success. You were always vain, Pierre Mariot. But, thank Heaven! I have never offered incense to your vanity."

Mariot's pale cheeks flushed when Mignon poked of his vanity; the shaft went home.

"I must go to your father. I must know the meaning of this. I will beg of him to bring you to reason."

"Is it my father that you wish to marry, monsieur, or his daughter?"

"Mignon, you are killing me!"

"The gifted and the good die young."

"What bitterness, Mademoiselle Bellmar. Will you not regret this? I may lose patience, and remorse may visit you when it is too late."

"Your vanity spoke then; but do not trouble yourself, I beg of you. When I repent my present decision, I shall better apprehend your menace. You wish to insinuate that I shall sustain a great loss. Believe me, now, I am perfectly resigned to it!" she rejoined.

"What will your worthy father say when he knows your determination? Mignon, spare him such grief, this union has been the dream of his life!"

"Are you then such a desirable son-in-law?"

Mariot felt himself demolished and prostrated. His pride was in ruins, but his anger streamed like fire above the wreck. He was astounded and at a loss. He knew not whether to retreat or go forward, his fair enemy had taken him so much by surprise.

"Go, Monsieur Mariot, and forget me. There is no possibility that my feelings will change. I refuse you for the best reason in the world. I do not like you. Would you wed a woman who makes this confession?"

"You are jealous, perhaps?" said Mariot, faintly.

"There is your unpardonable vanity again. Lovers only are jealous, and I cannot in the nature of things be jealous of a man whose presence is irksome. It is time this interview ended. I wish you happiness with one more like you in heart. Adieu, sir."

Mademoiselle Mignon arose, bowed ceremoniously, that is coldly, and left Mariot alone, who, a moment later, was heard hurrying through the hall to the street.

A month after the events just recorded, at the close of a day which had been uncommonly fine, a man on horseback approached a succession of rugged hills and defiles in the vicinity of those extensive prairies lying along the Nebraska River for many miles, the favorite hunting-grounds of the dreaded Blackfeet. It would have puzzled a hunter, even, to have determined whether the horseman was a white man or an Indian. Indeed, he could not well merit the term white, his rough features being much burned by the vehement suns of the prairies. There was nothing very notable about his appearance. His horse was a strong, tough nag, chosen more for his powers of endurance than for speed or beauty; while the rider and his belongings filled up the picture of a free-trapper, very well provided for the practice of his vocation.

He proceeded moderately, and with much circumspection, as if conscious that he was in a situation requiring constant vigilance. Soon he entered a valley almost destitute of vegetation, and at that hour gloomy as it was sterile. The trapper dismounted, after going the distance of a hundred rods or more, then turned to the right into a gully worn by a stream of water during the wet seasons, leading his horse by the bridle. The way must have been well-known to him, for he went forward with a confident step, though retaining his watchful deportment, like one resolutely determined not to be surprised by an enemy. For the next half hour he continued to advance, frequently pausing a moment to listen. He stopped in a small basin or hollow, shut in by trees and rocks—a spot that might be easily overlooked by a thousand men searching for a hiding-place. Near the middle of the dingle, half-buried in wild shrubbery, there was a hut made of sticks, and covered with bark, and which might have escaped a less vigilant eye; toward that humble habitation the trapper directed his steps. He pushed open the door, and a start of surprise indicated that he had made a discovery unexpected, and not wholly agreeable. A dusky figure, reposing by a fire that faintly glowed on the ground, sprang to his feet, and drew his hunting knife the instant the intruder looked in; but seeing who had disturbed him, returned the weapon to its sheath, keeping his hand on the handle, however, as if not altogether decided whether to assume a hostile attitude or not.

"Ravenclaw!" exclaimed the trapper.

"Beavertaker!" said the other, in the guttural tones of the red man.

"Why do you come to the hunting-grounds of the Blackfoot?" he asked, with a scowl of suspicion.

"I come because my wife is a Blackfoot, and my home is with her people. Does it seem strange to my brother that the heart of Beavertaker is heavy when he dwells in the wigwams of the pale-faces?"

"What is that you say? Are not your veins poisoned with the blood of the white man? Can you belong to the warlike Blackfoot, till you have bled away the venom of the pale-faces? No, you will be but a woman among warriors, a child among men," replied Ravenclaw, disdainfully.

"Your thoughts are sour, and your words are bitter. Hear me, Ravenclaw. I have been among the white men and found their hearts full of hatred; they drove me forth as if I had been a worthless dog, fit only to hunger and die on the prairie. I shook my hatchet at them, and came away with my heart burning for vengeance. I shouted the war-whoop of the brave Blackfoot nation, and turned my back on them. I said, I will go back to my adopted people, and tell them my wrongs, and ask them to lie in wait with me to take the scalps of my enemies. That is what I swore to do, and behold I am here."

Ravenclaw gave a slight exclamation of approbation.

"I came here to get news of my wife, and to unite myself to her people forever. But the heart of Ravenclaw gives me no welcome, and he tells me nothing of my wife. I have no friends, no home, no nation. I will go and dwell in solitude with the wild beasts."

"Some men have two faces and two tongues," said Ravenclaw. "They show one face to the white man, and another to the red; they talk with one tongue to the pale-face, and with the other to the Indian."

"I understand; you think I come to you with a lie in my mouth—with a hollow heart and empty hands. But you shall see."

Beavertaker called to his horse: the beast came to his side, he relieved him of his burden and turned him loose. A package which had been fastened to the crupper, he carried into the hut and opened. It contained various articles valued by Indians, beads, ribbons, high-colored stuffs, small mirrors, knives, etc.

An expression of contempt grew upon the Blackfoot's face.

"These things I have brought from the distant wigwams of the pale-faces; let my brother take what he likes, and the heart of Beavertaker will grow light again," said the half-breed.

Ravenclaw did not deign to look at the goods, and his brow contracted threateningly.

"What am I," he cried, in a startling voice, "that these pitiful trifles should be offered me? Am I a vain squaw, to covet such petty gew-gaws? You are not wise, Beavertaker, you are not wise; you do not yet know the soul of Ravenclaw. He wants no such foolery—he wants but his arms and his horse; more would be a burden to hinder his movements. You might dazzle the eyes of silly women with your gay wares, but the eyes of a true warrior can look at the sun without being dazzled. For this insult you deserve to die!"

"You are in bad temper, my brother. I will pack up my goods and go in search of my wife; and see if she is also my enemy."

"Listen: when the white man wishes to deceive the Indian, he commences giving him presents, and he ends by cutting his throat. Wa-wa! it is these presents of worthless stuff that are destroying the red races. Fools are they all who accept presents from the hands of the artful pale-face. Take them from my sight, lest I go mad and kill you!"

Beaver bound up his goods, and placed the package out of sight.

"You doubt me; but hear what I will tell you, and doubt no longer. A large party of the race you hate are at hand; they are going to the mountains to trap, and they have brought many packs of goods to buy peltries with. I will head a party of Blackfoot warriors to surprise them."

"That is better; but Ravenclaw always finds an enemy without a guide," returned the Indian, proudly.

"Do you longer doubt me?" asked the half-breed, calmly.

"I believe you would destroy when it is your interest to destroy."

"And I have another plan to revenge myself on these people, who are robbing our hunting and trapping grounds of game," said Beavertaker, in a suppressed voice.

"Speak."

"I will seek for him at the mention of whose name the white man trembles—Redpath!"

"Redpath!" repeated Ravenclaw, with a searching glance at the half-breed.

"Is the name of Redpath strange to the ears

of Ravenclaw? Has he not heard of his deeds, and rejoiced that there was one so daring among the warriors of the mighty Blackfeet? Is he deaf to the fame of the most dreaded of the red men of his nation?"

"I know him not," replied Ravenclaw.

"My brother's eyes are sharp; he can see a great distance, and he has a cunning understanding to comprehend that which is hidden, and to know the secrets of his people," continued Beavertaker, adroitly.

"The tongue of Beavertaker is crafty in the use of words, and he goes after secrets like a serpent crawling through the grass. But let him beware; they who seek are sometimes found; they who would guide the vengeance of the great Monito sometimes direct the shaft into their own breasts."

"It is dangerous then, to—"

"To seek the trail of Redpath, or to invoke the thunders of his arm. He goes where he will, and strikes because he will; his secret will die with him. He will remain as he is, and no one will be able to boast and say, 'I have seen him.' Depart in peace, and be not curious, if you would live to eat the flesh of the buffaloes that will soon cover yonder prairies. Keep your tongue from speaking more than you know, and your ears from hearing too much."

Ravenclaw spoke in a tone and manner that gave the half-breed a feeling of uneasiness that he could not entirely conceal, and of which he felt ashamed.

"You doubtless speak wisely, and in a way honorable to your great nation. I hope you will aid me to strike a blow at our enemies; they are ascending the Nebraska, and will soon be in the mountains."

"You have just said that my eyes and ears are open; they are—you have brought me no news."

The countenance of Beavertaker evinced surprise.

"My brother has been active, then; for it will be at least a week before their trail will pass this way."

And what is a week's travel by those who ride loaded horses and creep along like snails, There are blackfeet braves that can journey that distance in two days, and feel no weariness. Our people never sleep soundly when an enemy is near."

"Ravenclaw is called brave, a successful warrior, and a good counsellor. Will he be angry if I ask where is the wigwam of the Redpath?"

In the stately Indian darted a stern and menacing look at the half-breed.

"Son of the pale-face and the red!" he retorted in tones of authority mingled with anger. "you have too much curiosity to be a warrior. What is Redpath to you? He is naught. He is an eagle upon the mountains, that stoops not from his lofty flight to mate with meaner birds. He makes a swoop and fixes his talons with the speed of lightning; the next moment he is soaring to the sun, or perched in his eyrie far, far up the inaccessible cliffs. If you knew his lodge, if you could climb to his high nest, your breath of life would go out before another moon. Son of the Frenchman and the Indian woman, I can lead you to the wigwam of Redpath. By the son of Monedo, Redpath will die as he has lived, and the eyes of the pale-face shall never look upon his grave."

"Be it so, my brother. I spoke that I might be wiser."

"Wiser! My knowledge of Redpath is no thing. I know but his name and the fame of his deeds. Be not like the young and foolish who have no wisdom; but profit by the examples of mighty warriors and conquering chiefs. Go! you will find her you seek with a band of hunters encamped yonder toward the sunset. Go, and be wary; yet see that your heart is not big toward the race we abhor."

Beavertaker—known to the reader as Gardette, at Westport—studied for a few seconds, by the fitful fire-light, the calm and lofty features of Ravenclaw; then, with a compelled feeling of respect, took up his package of goods, placed it upon his horse, mounted, and rode toward the spot indicated by the haughty Indian.

CHAPTER V.

NEW MISFORTUNES BEFALL BRION'S BAND.

It has been stated that Brion observed that the youthful adventurer—who has twice passed before the reader's imagination—had glanced with some degree of interest at the hatchet that he found so singularly. Falling again in the rear of his band, after Buckeye's departure, he examined the weapon more particularly. It was small, and finished with scrupulous neatness, smooth as the surface of a mirror. It seemed to have but one defect—the handle did not appear sufficiently tight; and while noticing the fact, he discovered a piece of paper between the same and the eye into which it was fitted. With the point of his knife he drew out the paper, and was astonished to find there was writing upon it, which he hastened to read.

"You are closely and perseveringly watched by those who seek the ruin of your enterprise, and who will not hesitate to employ the most exceptionable means to insure their purpose. Be wary, if you would escape dangers pressing and imminent, and plots the most cunningly devised."

"This is extraordinary," exclaimed Brion, when he had read the foregoing lines. "I am closely watched, and am exhorted to be wary. Who wrote these words of warning? I would give six months' salary to know; they are traced with a pencil, and by a practiced hand, too. A plot! What does that mean? It refers to a rival company, clearly. Let me see: This was written a week ago, and I have been so stupid as not to discover it. Two deaths have occurred since that time—one last night, one the night before. But this is a strange way of communicating intelligence, and uncertain, withal; for, had I not discovered the hatchet, it might have remained there, and the paper with it, so all this good-will would have been lost. Who will say that the prairies have not their bit of romance? But who comes? A stranger, a white man, a hunter."

The man who excited the last remark, urged his horse to a gallop as he drew near; in a few minutes he was by Brion's side. The partisan, while affecting to regard his approach with indifference, or as a common-place affair, was really studying his features closely, trying to recall when and under what circumstances he had met him before; for it seemed to him that this was not their first meeting. Having described others of his calling, we have no inclination to inflict useless items of dress and outfit, while his person and bearing presented nothing very remarkable. His face was not easy to read, but might have passed very well for an honest one, marked neither by genius nor uncommon tact. He saluted Brion familiarly, who returned his salutation with civility. The latter's wish was to know whether the new-comer was in the employ of a rival company; it was a natural desire. He approached the subject with caution, and his meaning, without declaring it directly, was quickly understood.

"My name," said the trapper, "is Dorelle, and my business you can easily guess."

"Yes," said Brion.

"To relieve you from any suspicions that you may feel, I will inform you that I am not in the employ of any fur company, nor attached to a brigade of trappers."

"A free-trapper?"

"Thank fortune, yes. I want my liberty. I should not feel like a man if I were under another's control. Give me the mountains and prairies, and lakes and rivers, with nothing but my horse and my own will to guide me, and I am happy. Human authority galls me, or rather would gall me, were I to submit to it. Oh! I never could be a slave after having breathed the air of freedom in a country reaching from sea to sea, and provided by nature with enough to supply the simple necessities of man."

"You discourse like one to the wilderness born and bred," said the partisan.

"That is true. I was born on the border, and have been a rover since a boy. The ways of civilized life in great cities, and busy towns, do not please such as I. The noise of machinery, the smoke of crowded habitations, and the artificialities of modern usages, repel me, and make me more in love with my manner of life," added Dorelle.

"Where have I heard that voice?" queried Brion. "Have you crossed any Indian trail?" he asked.

"Yes, of a large body."

"Of what nation?"

"The most hostile and most dangerous—the Blackfoot."

"Which way did the trail tend?"

"Off in that direction to our left."

"Consequently, to avoid them—"

"You must keep close to the mountains on the right."

The partisan did not immediately reply; he reflected.

"That would seem like rushing into danger. The Blackfeet are wont to lie in wait in yonder defiles at the base of the mountains," he remarked, at length, in a careless tone.

"I know it; but it would appear from the direction of the trail, that they have changed their tactics."

"That is a very reasonable conclusion," quoth Brion. "To-morrow, I must think about changing our course."

"It would be prudent; but a man of experience like you, needs no advice."

"Here are my men," said the partisan, as they came up with the rear of that band. "Make yourself at home with them."

With these words he spurred forward, and was soon in advance of the foremost of the party, mounting every eminence, crossing every brook, and examining the ground where it was soft enough to yield to the pressure of human feet.

While thus actively engaged in reconnoitering, his thoughts were not wholly engrossed with his employment; they wandered back to Westport, to linger about the spot where he had seen Mignon. The clattering of horses' feet recalled his mind to the rough region of reality where his corporeal substance was.

"You see we have overtaken you, captain," said a voice.

Brion raised his eyes, and perceived several of the more thoughtless young men of his band, of whom Headley was the leading spirit.

"This is imprudent," exclaimed Brion, very sharply. "You had orders not to leave the main body."

"And why is it imprudent?" asked Headley, haughtily, for he liked not the tone of command which the partisan assumed.

"It is imprudent, in the first place, because you had my orders to remain with the brigade; and in the next, for the reason that a party of Blackfeet are lurking in the vicinity," said the mountaineer, firmly.

"Oh, is that all?" exclaimed Headley, with a derisive laugh, in which his companions joined.

"That is sufficient; I order you to return instantly," rejoined Brion, with a dignified and authoritative air.

"Are we then under martial discipline?" asked Headley, angrily.

"You are under my orders, and when I abuse my power, there will be time enough to rebel. It is my duty to use my authority when the general safety is concerned; therefore, go back."

Three of the refractory spirits reluctantly turned, and sullenly rode toward the brigade, which was about two miles in the rear, while Headley and two others obstinately kept on, disregarding orders.

"Men, you will regret this!" exclaimed Brion, in a voice free from anger or harshness, yet decided, and full of meaning.

"We will see, we will see!" retorted Headley, biting his nether lip with vexation.

The partisan's frank and manly face grew cloudy.

"These green hands," he muttered to himself, "will bring misfortune upon our enterprise. And I am responsible for all that happens. I was a fool to accept this post, but I will be obeyed!"

The mountaineer continued his investigations several hours, with all that tact and skill experience had taught him. He was thus busied, when he was joined by Buckeye, whose presence, at that moment, was desirable, as Brion felt the need of a friend on whom he could rely. They rode on side by side, the latter relating what had passed between him and Headley.

"There he is, yonder, waiting for the band to come up," said Buckeye.

"And a few yards before him is one of his foolhardy companions."

The partisan and Buckeye soon reached the spot where Headley was sitting.

"Where are your friends?"

"If you have eyes, you will see one of them, yonder, seated on a rock," he replied.

"And the other?"

"Is still farther ahead, on the other side of the ridge."

"Very well; you may consider yourself dismissed from the employment of the American Fur Company, Mr. Headley. From this moment, you are at liberty to go where you please."

"What do you say?" cried Headley, disagreeably astonished.

Brion made no answer, and, riding on, repeated the same words to the next man, who attempted to stammer forth excuses, which the partisan did not wait to hear. When he reached the top of the ridge spoken of by Headley, he looked for the third transgressor, whose name was Stringer, but Stringer was not visible.

Buckeye hurried forward, and descended the slope at a gallop. Before ten minutes had elapsed, he called to Brion to come on as fast as possible. Alarmed by the peculiar tones of Buckeye's voice, the mountaineer struck the spurs into his horse and dashed down the ridge. He found the trapper leaning over the pommel of his saddle, with pale cheeks and dilated eyes. Upon the ground, at the foot of Flash, was stretched the unfortunate Stringer—he was lying on his back, the blood had receded from his face, his lips were white, and he was gasping in the last extremity. Brion sprang from his horse, but the man was dead before he reached him.

The mountaineers gazed at the corpse, with feelings of indescribable awe. There was something crushing in the thought that a man who, a moment since, was full of life and youthful fire, was now but a clod—powerless, inert.

"Come in what form he will, death takes men by surprise; he arrives too soon—is always grim and terrible. Let him come in suddenness and mystery, when mortals have no intimation of his approach, taking one whose life seems good for many years, and he is doubly feared."

Brion and Buckeye were still contemplating the yet warm body, when Headley and his comrade came up—they had heard the trapper's call to Brion, and were suspicious that something strange had occurred. Drawing near, with downcast, anxious looks, they beheld the spectacle that kept the tongues of the mountaineers mute. Headley was astounded; his visage grew as pallid as the ashy features of Stringer. He allowed the bridle rein to fall from his grasp, and, with glassy eyes and parted lips, stared at the stiffening body of him who, a few minutes ago, was riding gaily at his side. An inexplicable dread fastened upon his heart—an indefinable trembling seized his limbs. He seemed to see an unknown danger approaching in circles that every instant lessened their diameter. In the ghastly face of Stringer he fancied he saw his own fate. Like him he should be stricken by an unknown dart, and like him be gazed at by eyes dilated by terror; like him be buried on the prairies, and left to eternal solitude.

Brion gave him a reproachful look—a look which accused him of being an accessory to his comrade's death.

"Do you see this?" said the partisan, when the silence had become oppressive.

Headley made an affirmative sign.

"And do you remember that I warned you of the danger of leaving the party?" continued the captain, with cold severity.

The Missourian sat motionless in his saddle.

"You claim some knowledge of surgery. Do you wish to examine this body?" resumed Brion.

Headley shook his head like one who wishes to say: "I have had enough of that; it is of no use."

Buckeye was sitting calmly upon his horse; he now darted a meaning glance at Headley from under his heavy brows. It needed no interpreter; he understood its signification perfectly. It asked him if he was satisfied—if he believed there were others who knew as much as he did.

"Have you an explanation to offer?" added the partisan.

"No," replied Headley, "I have nothing to say."

"Not so with me," said Buckeye. "I have a few words to say, which may, perhaps, make our wise friend from Missouri a trifle wiser—if that's possible. I'm pretty certain that my opinion on many points isn't worth a charge of powder; but what I know, I'm sure of. Now, sir (looking at Headley, if you want to discover

whether Stringer died of a disease of the head or heart, you shall be gratified."

Then addressing Brion:

"I said I had a secret to tell you to-morrow; but, seeing what's happened, I won't keep it any longer, for there'll never be a better time."

To Headley again:

"Now, sir, examine Stringer's head."

The Missourian dismounted, and, resting one knee on the ground, lifted Stringer's head, and holding it with the palm of his left hand, scrutinized it closely.

"I see nothing," he affirmed.

"Part the hair, just above his right ear, and you will find the head of a steel arrow driven through the skull, into the brain," said Buckeye.

"It is so!" exclaimed Headley.

"And yet there is no blood to indicate a mortal wound," said Brion.

"The hair is saturated very little underneath, next the skin," replied Headley; "but the fact that there is no hemorrhage is easily accounted for. The arrow-head is not much larger than a lady's bodkin, and makes but a mere puncture in the skin; being driven with great force, it penetrates deeply into the brain, causing instant paralysis of all the vital functions."

"That certainly seems to be an arrow-head," said Headley's friend, "but where is the shaft?"

"Look once more," added Buckeye.

Headley passed the point of a penknife into the scarcely perceptible wound, feeling carefully over the steel surface.

"It may be so contrived," he said, when he had reflected a moment, "that the shaft could be detached, after driving the point to its fatal destination."

"Or broken off!" suggested Headley's friend.

"And the shaft—what becomes of that?" queried Brion, looking at Buckeye.

"One thing's certain; it isn't to be seen in this case, and it was so in the other, too; so we can form what opinion appears most natural. I dare say the cunning reptile as did this, broke off the shaft and carried it away, as an act of bravado, as well as to mystify, and make things look unaccountable."

"I will see if he comes and goes without a trail," said Brion, throwing the bridle-rein to Buckeye.

"Remain just where you are, men, that no new track may be made," he added, commencing a close investigation of the ground, which continued until the entire party came up. The foremost, hearing what had happened, communicated it to those next to them, and the news ran quickly from mouth to mouth, until all were in possession of it. While those in the rear were pressing to the scene of the catastrophe, the partisan approached Buckeye, and said, in a low tone:

"I wish you to watch the stranger who joined us to-day. Keep your eyes on him when he looks at Stringer's body, and is hearing the circumstances that attended his death."

The trapper made a sign that he would do so. Dorelle was in no hurry, being the last to approach the corpse. When he beheld the white and rigid face, he shuddered and drew back, as if the spectacle had been more shocking than he had anticipated. Buckeye observed him closely while the story of the steel arrow was being told by those who had first reached the spot. That it produced in his mind feelings of unfeigned astonishment, the trapper did not doubt—his demeanor attesting it in every natural way.

There was now ample subject for conversation among the trappers—young and old confessing the same interest, the same awe. Stringer was buried as his companions had been, the mountaineers resuming their long and weary march, with saddened hearts and clouded faces, pondering darkly on the fate of Stringer, asking whose turn would come next, each mutually saying: "It may be me."

Headley, on whom the incident of the day had made a deep impression, rode up to Brion, the moment an opportunity offered when he could address him alone.

"I owe you an apology, captain," he said, "for my folly, and I hope you will be disposed to overlook what has passed. I acknowledge that I merited reproach, and the death of Stringer is a rebuke that will cause me sorrow so long as I live."

"I restore you to your place, Mr. Headley, and your friend, too, and will attribute your conduct to thoughtlessness, rather than obsti-

nacy," replied the partisan, with that frankness that characterized him.

Headley thanked him, and hastened to inform his refractory companion of the result of his apology.

Brion ordered a halt in the afternoon, for the purpose of hunting the buffalo, having killed but one since leaving Fort Laramie. A few of the most skillful hunters were sent out, the remainder of the band being strictly enjoined to keep within certain precincts; an injunction that the leader had no difficulty in enforcing, such a dread of their mysterious enemy had fallen on them. The hunt not proving successful, it was resolved to continue it during the next day; therefore their encampment was made to assume a more permanent appearance. Being in a dangerous neighborhood, a corral was built for the horses, and various precautionary measures were taken.

As the night drew on, Brion observed that many of the men grew anxious, even some of the veterans, so much had the fate of Stringer affected them. Within the corral, which was considerably large, a smaller inclosure was made, by placing the trunks of cotton-woods horizontally on the ground, one upon the other, until they reached as high as the breast of a man of ordinary height. Behind that shelter they hoped to escape the skill of their inexplicable adversary. We must, however, except the partisan and Buckeye from the number who entertained the idea of passing the night behind such a shelter. They had other thoughts.

"Look," said he to Buckeye, "the sun is sinking majestically upon the prairies; it is not easy to dispel the illusion that it will not rest on this mighty level, instead of passing to another hemisphere, to illuminate other mortals—to shine on other cities and peoples, mountains, lakes, and rivers."

"That was my own thought," replied the other; "but it would have been morally impossible for a rough old feller like me to express it in such a way. Human creatures may be constituted pretty near alike, cap'n, as to the real man, but we haven't all the same faculty of expression. Now that nat'rally reminds me of death, when the sun of life seems to be going down into the airth, so to speak, to be buried and extinguished forever. To all appearance, what there is of such as you and I ceases to be, is put into the ground to be compounded ag'in with the eternal elements, to play its part in other forms, till time shall be no longer. But, cap'n, there may be suthin' that rises like the sun, like it to shine forever in another region."

"God knows how fervently I hope so!" exclaimed Brion. "To believe that Stringer has a consciousness, at this moment, like yours and mine—as full, as perfect—would almost console one for his death; nay, it would quite!"

"Poor Stringer!" sighed Buckeye.

"I don't know whether to say poor Stringer, or not!" said Brion, impressively, looking up solemnly into the cloudless sky. "By heavens! he may be better off at this instant than you or I. I sometimes wish that the arrow of Red-path might enter my own brain, and thus dismiss me from care and pain."

"Pain and care! what pain and care should one like you have, cap'n? Perhaps you lost your heart at Westport?" rejoined Buckeye.

The partisan blushed—an assertion that may, perhaps, appear well nigh incredible to the reader; but it has been proved, numberless times, that the man who can face a battery, or an Indian in his war-paint, has the ability to blush when affairs of the heart are discoursed of, and pointed allusions made.

"If that be true, she who found it found nothing worth keeping, I fear," he answered.

"An honest one, sir, an honest one!" said Buckeye.

"You are getting along too fast, my friend. I have not yet confessed to the charge you were pleased to make."

The trapper declared, that to love a fair maiden was not to transgress laws divine or human.

"The men are gloomy!" said Brion, abruptly.

"Tis nat'ral, cap'n, after what's happened. They can't help thinking, that at the end of three months—if things go on in this way—there won't be many of them left. Each one says, 'I, too, may wake up some mornin', and find a steel arrow in my head.' Now, such an idea as that, when it fairly gets possession of a feller's mind, can't be considered very cheerin', accordin' to my view of matters gin'rally,

though you may have different notions, bein' better educated."

"By my faith!" exclaimed the partisan, "you are about right; the idea of being dogged by a single enemy, and picked off one by one at his leisure, is not pleasant. So far as the mere fact of dying is concerned, one could not choose an easier death; but people seldom reach that period when they are willing to submit to even the easiest death that can be contrived. The love of life is strong, and follows one alike through happiness and misery. Come, now, good Buckeye, tell me if you are yourself ready to offer your head to the fatal skill of Redpath?"

"By the beard of Joe Smith, no! I prefer to keep my upper story unbroken, and in a condition to be useful. You forget that I have a friend to provide for?"

"A friend?"

"Yes, and a good one, too; there he stands, yonder, eating grass like Nebuchadnezzar."

"Oh! you mean Flash!"

"Yes, Flash—a creature that has all the better qualities of the human species, with a great deal more speed."

"He is certainly swift of foot," said Brion, with a smile.

"The name of Redpath has often been mentioned between you and I, and you once did me the favor to ask my opinion consarnin' him; now I want to put the same question to you, for I've observed that you've been non-committal and on the fence, as 'twere, respectin' him."

"I will be very frank, Buckeye, and keep nothing from you. That we are followed by a vengeful enemy, is indisputable; that this enemy is cunning beyond any I ever encountered, I also freely admit; but if it be the famed Black-foot chief called Redpath, I have no means what ever of knowing. Familiar as the name of Redpath is to me, I will avow to you that I have, from the first, been inclined to consider him but the creation of some wonder-loving brain."

"You feel positively sartin that three of your party have been killed," said Buckeye, sarcastically, rather, for him.

The partisan answered in the affirmative, but added that they might have been killed, not by one savage, but possibly by three.

"That isn't altogether probable; a party of three would have more diffikilty in concealing their trail than one, as you'll understand at once, when you come to think of it. Agin; this sort of thing is done by one who has served a long apprenticeship at it, so to speak; otherwise he couldn't have acquired that awful sartinty that charaktarizes him. Depend on't, it's done by a riptile as has follered it for months, perhaps for years, growin' more and more acute, cunning, and terrible."

"Your reasoning is just; this marvellous act of approaching an encampment, this wondrous power of striking a victim with a precision that is deadly, and retreating without leaving trail or other sign than a dead body, is really startling, and well nigh staggers belief; but I am resolved to solve the apparently inexplicable mystery."

"Beware!" exclaimed the trapper, "beware what you do!"

"What! does a brave man as I have considered you to be, hold a single savage—armed, as it would seem, with a bow and arrow, in such dread?" said the partisan.

"Tell me who and where my enemy is, and I am not afraid to meet him; but it is embarrassin', to say the least, to seek a riptile who has the fakilty of makin' hisself invissible, who walks round ye without makin' any track, who kills ye afore you know he's near, who's off afore you've gasped away the breath of life. Where'll you go to find him? Will it be east or west, north or south, this way or that? You can't tell, because you don't know when you've found him? What assurance have ye that he won't see you first?"

"There are difficulties to be considered, and obstacles to surmount, but courage and a strong will can accomplish what, at first thought, appears impossible," returned Brion, firmly.

"If courage and a strong will can do so much, cap'n, why don't they keep the creature away from the camp-fires at night? Why don't courage and a strong will prevent him from killin' your men?"

Buckeye looked triumphantly at the partisan, who listened with interest to the development of the trapper's feelings, which he was internally determined he should lay bare.

"Until to-day, we have had but little warnin' of the presence of such a foe. The singu-

ar absence of wounds in the two first cases left some doubt on the mind in regard to the cause of their death, and it is only a few hours since the mystery was cleared up. I shall now use every precaution to prevent the recurrence of similar visitations that experience and prudence can devise; but it is a humiliating thought that seventy men are forced to extraordinary measures for protection against a single savage arm; it shames me, Buckeye, and makes me doubt that I have passed ten years in the mountains, where dangers are thick, and skill is indispensable. If I do not put a stop to this, the name of Ben Brion will cease to be quoted as a brave and sagacious man, fit to command in the most trying emergencies."

"Don't lay it so much to heart, for you ain't without witnesses that you've been prudent as a human bein' could be, under the circumstances. Human foresight can't foresee every-thing."

"If matters progress as they have begun, my witnesses will be dumb ones," said Brion, with a smile.

"And deaf, too," quoth Buckeye.

"I think I may trust you!" resumed the partisan.

"You can't tell till you try me," returned the trapper, drily.

"I wish to tell you—move this way a little, the very person I was going to speak of is watching us—that I am suspicious of the good faith of this stranger, Dorelle. If you were to ask my reasons, I am very sure I should not be able to give them. I shall watch him."

"I'll take him in hand, too, cap'n, and see what I can make of him. If I discover mischief in him, he'd better be among the Black-foot or the Apaches," said Buckeye, determinedly.

"He is to be depended on, if ever man was trustworthy," said Brion to himself, as he walked about the encampment to see if all had been done according to his orders—the remark referred to the trapper.

CHAPTER VI.

GOLD-HUNTING IS TALKED OF.

Evening came. The hunters and trappers were gathered about the camp-fires in groups, cooking their supper, discussing the all-engrossing subject of the day. Each in turn gave his opinion, hazarded a conjecture, or recited some startling tale of Indian cunning and cruelty. The young men of the band had less to say than usual; their ardor was cooled; they fervently wished themselves within the pale of civilization again, no longer finding fault at the lack of incident that attended their march. The faces of Stringer, Minten, and Townsend were constantly before them, reviving and keeping vivid the mystery of their death, the awful suddenness of their departure.

"It would appear," said Headley, "that we are destined to fall by the wayside, one at a time. We shall mark each day's journey by a grave."

"That is true," responded a young man by the name of Conroy, who but two days before had complained of the monotony of their journey, and its paucity of adventure.

"I wonder," resumed Headley, as if talking to himself, "if we were hired for the purpose of being shot in the head with a steel arrow?"

The query, though addressed to no one in particular, caught like a train of powder, just as it was intended. The short but expressive monosyllable "No," made the circuit of the group in an instant.

"That is my own opinion," added Headley. "I have from the first entertained the idea that our services were engaged to trap and hunt?"

"In course," said Conroy, sullenly.

"But it's too late now, I suppose, to save ourselves. Seeing we must all succumb to the foul fiend that dogs us, sooner or later, I expect we must make the best of it. It would be well, however, to suggest to the captain to dig a grave every night, so that our march won't be delayed in the morning. We could then look in each other's faces and seem to realize that one of us is actually trembling on the boundary of the other world."

"God save me from such a realization for many a year!" exclaimed Conroy, glancing around uneasily.

"Oh, it is an easy death," added Headley, adroitly, knowing well how to excite the fears of his comrades.

"If you covet such a fate, seek it; but it fills me with unspeakable dread!" cried Conroy, with a shudder.

"It is so sudden, that one has no chance to repent," said Dorelle, who had joined the group. The young trappers looked encouragingly at their new ally.

"I wish we could change our route, so as to leave this accursed trail!" protested Headley, with increasing boldness.

"I had thought," added Dorelle, artfully, "that you were one of the partners, and not an employe?"

"Oh, no, sir. I'm under the orders of Ben Brion!" said Headley, with a sardonic laugh.

"Indeed! that is singular! I've had my suspicions that fur hunting was not the real object of this expedition," added Dorelle.

"What other object could there be in view?" interrogated Headley, snapping eagerly at the bait Dorelle had thrown out.

"It isn't expedient for a man to tell his thoughts always; but the moment I saw you this morning, I said to myself, 'this man has a higher object than peltries ahead.'"

The attention of the Headley elique was fixed inquiringly upon Dorelle.

"Foudre! you are deceiving me; confess now, that you have heard of the discovery of gold in the mountains?"

The Missourian's eyes flashed with expectation.

"Speak low, Monsieur Dorelle, speak low," he exclaimed, earnestly.

"I knew I was right," asserted Dorelle, affecting to be elated at his far-sightedness.

"You are wrong, sir; we have heard nothing of the discovery to which you refer; but you see here a score of good fellows, ready for any enterprise that promises well, and will take them out of this infernal region!"

"Not so fast, my friend! If you have not heard of the new gold regions, it is best that I remain silent. *Ma foi!* why should I dazzle you with the tales of a region surpassing in richness all the wealth of the oriental kings; it would fill your dreams with extravagant incongruities, and destroy your peace when waking."

"You excite my curiosity to the highest degree, Monsieur Dorelle. Tell me of this land of yellow dust. Is it a thing known to all, or is it a secret faithfully kept by a few?"

"It is known only to a certain number of French voyageurs and hunters, who keep it tenaciously. It was only by accident that I got possession of it."

Headley rubbed his forehead, and fidgeted about nervously.

"Will you allow me to ask if you have any intention of turning this important affair to your own advantage?" he inquired.

"Self-interest, I believe, is uppermost in the human mind, with very few exceptions. Like others, I am striving for a living, working diligently with my head and hands to accomplish my purpose. Would it not be natural that I should think much of what I have been telling you? You will say yes, like a reasonable man, and be right, too; for I have thought of this subject, day and night, for weeks. There are difficulties to conquer, obstacles to surmount, dangers to meet; but men of courage, determination and perseverance can overcome all. What is there that man cannot do when the motive is powerful and the will strong? These mines are situated in a dangerous neighborhood, farther from us than the ground already traveled, in a different direction from our present route, through the countries of savage nations—the Utahs, the Navajoes, the Pimos, the Maricopos, and lastly, the famous Apaches."

A cloud of disappointment passed over Headley's face—the distance and danger startled him, and depressed his hopes.

"You are speaking of that region lying between New Mexico and the Great Basin—the country of an extinct nation—the Aztec?" he added.

"Yes, the land of the ancient Aztec, traces of whose art and industry yet remain."

"Have you ever been there, Monsieur Dorelle?"

"I have passed months there; traversed its valleys and mountains, seen its rivers, gazed with awe upon the Casa Montezuma."

"I imagined that was a fabulous fabric, existing in the minds of credulous people."

"Ah, my friend, you see before you a man who has actually seen the Casa Montezuma—a mighty, but still grand ruin, where the great

king, whose name is yet spoken with reverence by the native, once dwelt in barbaric splendor. The sight of that crumbling edifice, which seems to connect the past with the present, produced emotions which I cannot describe. It brought to my vision the phantom past, venerable yet grim; grey, yet gloomy; silent, yet speaking a language not to be misinterpreted, telling of enjoyments gone, glory departed, power-decayed."

Dorelle spoke with apparent enthusiasm, and was now the central point of attraction to the wondering group. The men gathered round him as if he were an oracle unlocking the past as well as laying open the future. One who has the faculty of making others believe that he has heard more, seen more, and knows more than his auditors, will always stand, in their estimation, like Saul among the prophets. Thus it was with Monsieur Dorelle; he was the hero of the hour, the marvel of the inexperienced and sanguine, who sat that night at the camp-fire of the partisan.

"A vast region of ruins and hidden wealth is that country," added Dorelle. "The treasures of an extinct race are concealed ingeniously beneath walls now crumbling, and buried in earth, now overgrown with rank weeds, with the mezquit, the parasitic vine, the wild sage, and the dwarf pine. *Foudre!* it sets my blood in a hot fever to think of it. A few hardy, adventurous men, a little faith, with boldness and perseverance, would suffice to acquire those riches. I have sought such persons; but, upon my honor, messieurs, I cannot find them—or rather, I cannot make them have confidence in the treasures of that country."

"You shall soon cease to complain, Monsieur Dorelle!" cried Headley, looking at his friends. "Here are those who have not only faith, but resolution. Discontented with their present circumstances, they wait but an opportunity to change their course and their prospects. Tell me, sir, can the dangers you refer to be greater than that strange fatality that now follows in our trail like the Angel of Death, transfixing one and another with his dart?"

A visible tremor shook Dorelle's person.

"Not half so fearful," he replied, in a voice sunken almost to a whisper. "I can conceive of nothing more diabolical than the systematic killing of this savage or devil, or whatever he may chance to be. Being naturally superstitious, I acknowledge that I have much difficulty in persuading myself that this pathless, trackless power is human. Ah, messieurs, they may call him Redpath, if they will, but to me he is a demon."

"That's what I say!" exclaimed Conroy striking his right knee violently with the corresponding hand, to give proper energy to his words.

"And I, also," said Loretto, a Mexican, and Violette, a Creole, and half a dozen others.

"This is gratifying!" exclaimed Dorelle. "I expected to become an object of ridicule among you, after making such an avowal; but I am agreeably disappointed. I am a Catholic, messieurs, a staunch believer in the devil, and that the devil sometimes assists his instruments in the flesh."

"No doubt of it!" muttered Loretto, crossing himself.

"My lads," said Headley, "what say you to turning our footsteps toward Gila River, in search of treasure?"

"I care not whether we go, providing we but change our course," responded Conroy, and several others.

"Will you lead us there, if we can enlist enough in our interest to make the expedition promising?" asked the Missourian, again turning to Dorelle.

"Gladly!" he answered, emphatically.

"Who will go? who will go?" cried Headley, with enthusiastic eagerness. "Come, let those who will go, speak—and speak in earnest!"

Ten persons, comprising all in the group, instantly signified their willingness to follow Dorelle, and desert Brion.

"Warn them to be cautious, and not let their intentions be known," whispered Dorelle to the Missourian, who immediately gave instructions to that effect, which they promised to observe.

"One thing we have overlooked; we need an outfit to undertake such a long and trying expedition; all these things around us, we must bear in mind, belong to the American Fur Company, and not to us."

"I can assist you somewhat in regard to

that," said Dorelle. "I have a *cache*, fortunately, provided for this very object."

"If we were not where we are, I should cry 'three cheers for Monsieur Dorelle,'" said Headley, joyfully. "Now, my friends, fortune and adventure are before us," he added, with an enthusiasm he did not attempt to disguise, and which his companions shared.

Buckeye, during this conversation, was sleeping (or seemed to be) on a pile of packs and saddles, a few yards distant; his proximity was either not known or not cared for. Flash approached his master, and smelled round him, as if to assure himself that he was there, and his footsteps had the effect to arouse him. He arose to his elbow, rubbed his eyes, then spoke to his horse, and finally walked to another part of the encampment.

Brion, meanwhile, left the corral, having given such directions as he deemed necessary for the safety of all. The fatality attending his march weighed heavily upon his mind. As captain, or partisan, he was responsible for the safe conduct of the party to the trapping grounds. There were accidents and contingencies against which he could not guard; but how should he make it appear thus to his employers? Would not his leadership be faulted by those whose pay he received? Would they not call his courage and perspicacity in question, when it was known that their enterprise was in danger of total failure through the agency of a single savage, armed as it would seem with a bow and arrow? The partisan was ready to pluck out his hair with vexation. As he had stated to Buckeye, he was mortified and humiliated beyond measure. It made his cheeks redden with shame to anticipate, even, being thought weak and pusillanimous. He believed it would surely be said that he was wanting in energy, promptness and foresight. What a thing to be said of Ben Brion—a man who had been on the trail ever since he left school, a mere boy!

He paced slowly about the encampment, far enough from it not to be seen.

"Perchance," he said, to himself, "my own brain may be pierced by the shaft of this secret foe. Be it thus; I alone will expose myself to his aim this night. If he has the temerity to approach one whose eyes are quick to trace a trail, and whose ears are educated to hear an enemy, let him look to it; he may, perhaps, regret his boldness! Ah! I am forgetting his fatal skill—his deadly cunning!"

The partisan sighed, and thought of Mignon.

"It might have been—it might have been!" he added, in a low tone, that savored much of sadness. What it was that "might have been" he did not say, but instantly shaking off his dreaminess, began to act the keen and watchful scout, a thing which a sojourn of over ten years in the mountains had rendered easy, and which, hitherto, had been attended with a kind of pleasure; but this was before he met Mignon, and lost his heart—since which event he had experienced less happiness in the practice of his wandering trade. Mignon followed him everywhere; Mignon was tireless in pursuing him; Mignon was with him in his dreams; she was a fair, but ever-present spirit, that could not be laid.

The realization of all this revealed the mountaineer to himself in a new light. He had not supposed it possible that he could be captivated by a pretty face, and so enslaved by the charming conqueror; it was a new revelation, a hitherto unread page in his own character. He believed his passion hopeless; and not only hopeless, but foolish extremely. He did not expect to see her again, and it was madness to cherish her resemblance so fondly.

Although reflections like these went teeming through Brion's brain, it did not divert him from his duty; he kept his dangerous vigils with firmness and skill, exposing himself thus, voluntarily, to be faithful to his trust, and save those under his direction. Men are apt to think soberly and rationally in the silence and quietude of night, and it was thus with the partisan. He asked what or who it was that he feared; or, more properly, that threatened the destruction of his trappers and hunters. He had heard the name of Redpath spoken often in the mountains, when encamped by lonely streams and distant solitudes; sturdy veterans had recounted his deeds, while friendly Indians told of his cunning—attributing his success to the interposition of Machinito, the bad spirit; but how much of this did he credit? What had happened under his own observation to prove

that these tales were not without foundation; that there was really truth in what mountain-rumor had been telling so long in the defiles and passes? Brion considered the subject from various points, concluding this ordeal of self-examination by confessing a belief in Redpath. It was midnight when he reached that ultimatum. The stillness of the night had remained unbroken, save by the bark of the prairie dog, or the howl of the wolf—those constant attendants of the mountaineer in his lengthened pilgrimages across a mighty country; where, in the revelations of years, human cities are to rise, and the genius of civilization is to walk with foot untiring.

The partisan stood with his head thrown forward, all his senses awake to detect the slightest sound. An owl emitted its ominous cry, which echo caught and prolonged in a series of mournful wailings, which died away in the valley and far-off passes.

"Ah!" exclaimed Brion, without changing his position.

He waited for something—apparently the repetition of the cry—but it came not. He cast his eyes toward the encampment; the moonbeams were lying tranquilly upon it; the stars twinkled overhead serenely, as if bidding the weary to forget care and sleep.

Brion's attention was yet fixed on the encampment, when he saw a man leaving the corral. Had he walked out boldly and carelessly, the partisan's suspicions would not have been aroused; but he stole out as a thief might leave the scene of his depredations.

"Honest men do not move in that way," muttered Brion.

At that moment the owl hooted again—more loud and shrilly than before. Clear of the corral, the man advanced cautiously toward the spot where the mountaineer was standing; the latter instantly changed his position, screening himself behind the trunk of a cypress. It was Dorelle who approached, as Brion very soon discovered.

"Yes, Monsieur Dorelle, you are the one I intended to watch," thought the hunter, as the Frenchman passed his hiding-place. Brion followed him toward the Wind River range, from the margin of the prairie upon which his camp had been pitched, into a tract of country cut up by gulleys, broken by sharp hills, covered with pinon, stunted oaks, and aspen.

Dorelle stopped and remained motionless for several minutes. Presently the owl hooted: Dorelle barked like a prairie dog, and went on. The cry of the owl came from a canon, not far beyond: it was toward the canon that Dorelle hastened.

"Now," mused Brion, "we will learn what this signaling is for."

The ground between them and the canon was soon traversed. Dorelle barked again, and the owl hooted but a few paces from him.

"Is it you, Gardette?" asked Dorelle.

"It is I, Monsieur Mariot," replied Gardette, or Beavertaker, as we shall prefer to call him, in honor of his Indian relatives.

"Ah!" exclaimed Brion, again—an innocent exclamation that he was in the habit of using when surprised; for the partisan never employed oaths, even when excited.

Mariot and Beavertaker advanced and met.

"I have many things to inquire about," said the former. "How do you succeed with the Blackfeet?"

"At first I was looked upon with distrust, but my wife at length restored confidence; so you see it is a good thing to have an Indian wife, though one be but half an Indian."

"Well?" said Mariot, impatiently.

"A party of one hundred young warriors are already on the alert, and it will be strange indeed if—"

The remainder of the sentence was spoken in a tone so low that Brion could not hear it. He crept nearer.

"Be sure that you make no mistake, for my own party are encamped in a valley not far below us."

"Diable, that is bad, for all is fish that comes to their net—the Blackfeet I mean. If they should strike their trail, I could not restrain them. I have seen Ravenclaw, a chief of great consequence; but he dislikes me, and is too proud to be advised or led by one with white blood in his veins. I spoke of Redpath; but my curiosity provoked him. He frowned and looked dangerous, and in a terrible voice told me to begone, and put a bridle on my tongue; since that, I have not dared to speak the name of Redpath."

"Nor is there need; he is already upon the trail, doing fearful work. Three have been stricken, and more will follow. Discontent is in the camp—the expedition will fail."

"Ah!" said Brion.

"Did you hear anything?" asked Beavertaker.

Mariot said no.

"Diable! Can this be true, Monsieur Mariot?"

"Can what be true?"

"That Redpath is on the trail of Brion's brigade."

"Mon Dieu, it is a fact! He kills with a steel arrow, which pierces the brain. It is terrible, but does my work; it cripples the power of that accursed company that threatens to ruin the house of Bellmar and Mariot."

"You run some risk yourself," said Beavertaker.

"I know it! therefore my stay with the band will be short. I have already sprung my mine on the discontented ones. I have worked on their fears and their cupidity. I shall take away at least a dozen of his men, which will be a severe blow. Meantime, have your warriors concealed in the canon which you named when I saw you before, and—"

"I understand," said the half-breed.

"They have some good horses—a fact which it would be well to let your red devils know."

"They shall be stolen," replied Beavertaker.

"They may, perchance, cache some of their goods?"

"We will open the cache."

"They, possibly, may wish to fight?"

"We will fight them, monsieur."

"Foudre! that is as it should be. Now I must see my band of trappers and hunters."

"Did you come with them?"

"No; with a company of United States soldiers, who were sent to Fort Laramie. I found Kincaid, who bore me company till this morning—or, rather, till yesterday morning, as it is now past midnight—and by whose means I have held communication with the captain of my band. I shall meet Kincaid at the Red Buttes, where he is, at this moment, probably, awaiting me with two horses."

After further conversation, Pierre Mariot left the canon, followed by Brion, who felt too much interest in his movements to dismiss him from further espionage. Kincaid was with the horses at the specified place, and the worthy pair rode away together. Fortunately for the partisan, the ground was of such a nature that they could not proceed very fast, so that he kept in sight of them without much exertion. They conversed but little, and Brion could not hear what they said. They finally reached the valley near which Beavertaker found Ravensclaw, as related in another chapter. Entering it, the mountaineer saw the fires of an encampment. The camp was large, extending some rods along the valley, numbering, he judged by a casual survey, one hundred persons, or even more.

The horses and pack-mules of the party were side-lined, and quietly feeding within eighty yards of the band; and it was there that Mariot stopped, sending forth Kincaid to request Captain Callard, the leader, to come to him. While Pierre was waiting, Brion placed him in a position to hear to the best advantage, with the least danger of discovery. The rival partisan came, when the same matters were talked of that had been discussed by the half-breed. Those topics having been duly considered, Callard broached another, which had the merit of novelty, and interested Brion equally as much.

"There is one circumstance to which I must call your attention," said Callard. "A youth joined us at Fort Leavenworth, whose conduct has been suspicious. Once, certainly, he has had communication with Captain Brion's band, and on several occasions has manifested a desire to visit the camp of our rivals; but he has been so closely watched, that save in the instance I have named, I do not think he has been able to do much mischief, if such was his intention."

Brion did not say "Ah!" but he thought it which answered his purpose.

"An informer among your men may do incalculable injury," said Mariot, earnestly.

"This is not all, Monsieur Mariot; it is said by some in camp that this youth is a woman."

"Diable!" exclaimed Mariot.

"Ah!" said Brion in a whisper.

"A woman?" added Pierre.

"A woman!" repeated Callard.

"What the devil could send a woman among you?" asked Mariot, angrily.

"It may have been love of adventure: it may have been simply, love."

"A woman! love! Callard, this is getting romantic."

"Remember, that it is first to be known that the youth is a woman, and then whether she is in love, before we can judge if things are growing romantic."

"By what name is this youth called?"

"Crevier."

"What is his deportment, generally?"

"He is singularly reserved—holds himself aloof from the men, loves solitude, and his sole companion is a colored man, who attends him like his shadow, treating him with very great deference."

"The colored man is his servant, and appeared with him in the first instance?"

"Yes."

"What was his ostensible object in attaching himself to your party?"

"To join his father, he said, who has a trading house on the Yellow Stone. Fearful that he might be a spy in the service of the American Fur Company, I have kept a constant watch on his movements."

"I must see this Crevier; do me the favor to ask him to come here."

Crevier soon appeared, followed by a stout African.

Brion recognized his youthful visitor, and regretted more than ever his unfriendly suspicions at the time of their first meeting. He looked upon his comely face and slender figure with new interest, doubting not but a woman's heart was beating beneath that masculine garb.

CHAPTER VII.

IMPORTANT DISCOVERIES ARE MADE.

Pierre Mariot had dismounted, and was standing with his right arm on the saddle, his face partially concealed from the eyes of the approaching youth by the horse's head. Crevier advanced hesitatingly, the negro pressing closer to him as he drew near. The partisan was nervously anxious to obtain a fair view of his features—a fact showing an important change in his feelings since the night Crevier sat by his lonely fire.

"It is, indeed, a woman," he said, mentally. Mariot was no less anxious to see the youth, and mark his bearing.

"Well, sir," said Pierre, abruptly, "I have sent for you to ask a few questions concerning your father's trading house on the Yellow Stone River."

Crevier recoiled at the sound of Mariot's voice, and was much agitated. The negro whispered to him, which in some degree restored his self-possession.

The partisan noticed that Mariot evinced surprise, which betrayed itself in his tones.

"Why do you wish to question me?" asked Crevier, with some trepidation.

"For the object I have stated."

"What if I refuse to answer them?" Crevier resumed.

"I shall be obliged to compel you, possibly."

"Member dis chile am here!" said the African to Crevier, looking menacingly at Mariot.

"Let that nigger be silent!" added Mariot, sternly.

"He has a right to speak, I think; he is not in your employ, and therefore not responsible to you, but to myself alone," continued Crevier, with spirit.

"Dat am 'actly it!" quoth Balaam, whose name had the merit of being scriptural.

"Captain Callard, will you rap that nigger over the head," said Mariot.

Captain Callard manifested a disposition to rap Balaam over the head, but that nigger doubled a very large fist and held it so Callard could see it, which had the desired effect to restrain his enthusiasm.

"Do you know, sir," Mariot continued, addressing Crevier, "that I'm disposed to consider you a spy in the employ of the American Fur Company?"

"You are at liberty to think so," was the quiet rejoinder.

"Captain Callard, it will be necessary that this young man be severely punished, as an example to others."

"That is my opinion, Monsieur Mariot."

The partisan was observing Mariot as well as his position would allow, and plainly perceived

that he was endeavoring to terrify Crevier and throw him off his guard; but if that was his intention, he failed—the youth remained undaunted.

"How are spies usually punished, captain?"

"Oh, with death, monsieur, always."

"That was my impression. What is this black man's name?"

"Balaam," said Callard.

"Well, Balaam will have to suffer with his master."

In answer to this consoling information, Balaam looked at the moon, and winked assiduously.

"Leave me a few moments with this young man, captain, and take the nigger with you."

"Come, Balaam," said Callard.

"I stays with massa, allers," replied Balaam, firmly.

"But I wish you to go," said Mariot.

"An' I wish to stay where I is," returned Balaam, pertinaciously.

The captain approached him with the intention of laying his right hand upon his shoulder to lead him away; but Balaam assumed such a belligerent attitude, that he deemed it prudent to forego his purpose, and walk off without him.

"This is all very strange," said Mariot, when the captain was out of hearing.

"What do you refer to?" asked Crevier, in a faltering voice.

"It is useless to wear the mask longer, Mademoiselle Mignon."

"My secret is discovered, alas!" cried the youth.

"Oh, it required but a glance to penetrate your disguise. He that loves has sharp eyes," Mariot rejoined, with something of triumph in his manner.

"Let me entreat that you will not betray me, Monsieur Mariot?" said Mignon, in supplicating tones.

"Ah, Mignon, had it been for my sake, I should be the happiest of men; but I dare not flatter myself that such is the case!" said Pierre, softly.

"For his sake!" muttered Brion.

"Do not flatter yourself too much, monsieur."

"Then you had another object in view?"

"Your vanity is without parallel!"

"You persist in averring that you have not regretted—that is, that you have not changed your mind in regard—"

"To your proposal!"

"Yes."

"I should hate myself if I had no nobler object in view, Monsieur Pierre!"

"And very properly," too, quoth Brion, to himself, whose heart was beating violently.

"Diable! You are the same! I had hoped—"

"That I had repented?"

"Precisely."

"But you see I have not?"

"Do you know, Mademoiselle Bellmar, that this frankness may injure you?"

"Explain."

"Do you not perceive that you are in my power?"

"Oh, you are there!"

"Yes; I command here. I sued at Westport."

"I forgot for the instant that I was talking to a villain," replied Mignon, with dignity.

"Excellent," quoth the partisan. "She has him there!"

"Mignon, reflect upon your situation. I have power to protect you—to keep your secret, to preserve you from ridicule."

"And if you were a gentleman, you would do so unconditionally."

"That your conduct has been bold and unmaidenly, I think you must own; with such a precedent before me, I may venture to be bold and unmanly. What have you to answer to such logic?"

"Unmanly you are; but if by boldness you mean physical courage, I should say you will never be bold."

"Be sarcastic, if you will; yet it seems to me that we meet under circumstances in which you would do well to abate your pride and hold humbler language. You are at present so situated, as to be under my authority."

"I do not acknowledge your authority. You cannot, without an unwarrantable usurpation of power, restrain my actions or control my movements."

"Your personal comfort shall be attended to as far as my means will allow, and you shall be

treated with respect by my men; but you must know that you are not at liberty to leave the party."

"Dare you thus presume to take from me my freedom? By what right, Monsieur Mariot, do you thus assume authority over me?"

"By the right of might."

"That is well answered; but hear my protest. I will not submit to your tyranny. There must be men of honor in your party. I will throw myself upon their generosity; they will protect me."

"These men are in my pay."

"And my father's, too; you forget that you are the junior partner."

"I remember everything that I wish to remember, Mademoiselle Bellmar."

"A rare faculty."

"In the name of all that is wild and marvelous, tell me your motive for unsexing yourself and running such a quixotic career?"

"That is a secret of my own keeping, fortunately."

"Your motive must have been extraordinary. Your father will lose his reason when he hears of this?"

"God avert such a calamity!" exclaimed Mignon, with fervor.

"You do well to invoke the name of God after committing this fatal error. You should have reflected and deported yourself as becomes one of your sex and age. But this mountain pilgrimage, I'll wager my reputation, is all for love!"

"Don't wager your reputation, Monsieur Pierre—the stake is too great!"

"You sustain your part bravely, I'll admit; but be assured I'll probe your secret to the bottom. Ah, Mignon, the time will come when you shall redden with shame at the sound of my voice, it shall so remind you of your folly."

"It reminds me of everything absurd at this moment."

Balaam rubbed his hands and laughed. Mariot bit his lip with vexation, and called Callard, who was waiting his pleasure at the nearest fire.

He came, and with him two persons—Grenier and Kincaid.

"Men," said Mariot, "you are to watch this youth, this Monsieur Crevier and his servant, and see that they do not leave the party. I have special reasons for wishing them to remain with us."

Callard bowed and smiled.

"Captain," said Mignon, gently, "I hope we shall be friends?"

"I—I trust so," responded Callard, considerably embarrassed.

"Here is my hand, captain," she added, extending that little member, with charming grace to the leader, who could not refuse the tempting offer; while Pierre beheld the demonstration with ill-concealed anger and jealousy.

"And yet, mad—Mr. Crevier, I mean—I expect I shall be obliged to restrict you to certain limits; but my authority shall be mildly exerted, believe me."

"Beware, captain," said Pierre, with a forced smile. "You're upon dangerous ground."

Mariot had advanced a little, and now stood two paces in front of his horse, with the bridle upon his arm. Callard, Kincaid, and Grenier were at his right, at the distance of three or four yards, while Mignon and Balaam were on the left. Brion occupied a position to see the parties very well. What had just passed between the captain and Mignon did not escape his notice, but gave a painful sensation, which was new to him. Possibly it was for Callard that she had left a happy home to tempt the dangers and hardships of the mountain. Although the idea was unpleasant for a moment, he really envied the captain.

"Fortunate man!" he murmured. "Fortunate man; you have pressed that little hand!"

The partisan's brow was clouded; sorrow and indignation were contending within. At one moment, his limbs seemed losing their strength; at another, he appeared to be suffocating with some new malady that pressed his heart from his chest to his throat. He bent forward that not a word might escape him, so intensely interesting were the developments. Mariot turned to Grenier, and said:

"I suppose you are ready to render an account of what you have done?"

Grenier was about to reply, when some object whistled through the air. Grenier threw up his arms, rolled his eyes wildly, and fell upon his face. There were simultaneous cries of astonishment. The long, smoothly-wrought

shaft of an arrow protruded from Grenier's head.

Mariot proceeded from the spot in absolute terror, as if expecting to feel the point of the steel bolt in his own brain.

"Mon Dieu!" he cried, with a shudder.

"Pierre Mariot," exclaimed Mignon, pointing at Grenier, "read your destiny; behold how Heaven will punish your evil deeds!"

"Doomed!" muttered Kincaid, despairingly, dropping his chin upon his breast, while Callard, with more presence of mind, sprang into the adjoining thicket, rifle in hand.

"Come back," shouted Mariot; but Callard was already in the bushes. It was fortunate for Brion that the captain turned to the northern instead of the western side, for it was from that quarter that the arrow had apparently been projected. After beating about in the thicket for a few minutes, Callard returned, having seen no enemy.

"Look at your misguided instrument, and tell me if you are prepared to go as suddenly?" said Mignon to Pierre, warningly.

"Instrument?" repeated Mariot, with a quickness that proved she had touched a sensitive spot. "You know too much, Mignon!"

"Now, would it not be singular, Monsieur Mariot, if you should meet the fate of the man at your feet," she resumed, impressively.

Pierre looked at the dead man, and breathed heavily; an indefinable awe was tugging at his heart—a phantom hand menaced him.

Callard attempted to draw the arrow from Grenier's head; but it broke close to the skull, the steel point remaining firmly embedded in brain.

Mignon and Balaam walked toward the encampment; Mariot followed in three minutes—the camp was astir, hunters and trappers running to the place where Grenier had fallen.

The partisan hurried away from the locality, much excited by what he had seen and heard. Indeed, it was to him a night of startling revelations; but being of a strong, well-balanced mind, he regained his wonted calmness—to appearance—before he reached the encampment his band.

Buckeye met him outside the corral, where he had been impatiently awaiting him.

"By the beard of Joe Smith!" he exclaimed, "I've a nice bone for you to pick, and have been waitin' to throw it to you for more than three hours."

"Well, give it a toss—I will catch it," quoth Brion.

"You'll growl over it, I'll warrant."

"I promise not to bite."

"Well, here it is: there's mutiny in the camp—the trappin' business is at a discount, and gold huntin' in the Aztec kentry is at a premium."

"Ah!"

"Jes' so, cap'n, I reckon."

"Who is at the head of the new enterprise?" "Headley, of course; but that new feller, the Frenchman, sprang the trap on 'em."

"Why, Headley apologized for his conduct?"

"Perhaps he will agin; comes kind of natural to him, don't it?"

"I, too, have made discoveries, Buckeye."

"Open your pack."

"If I possess any considerable tact in reading human character, you are an honest man. May I reckon upon your friendship and assistance?"

"By the beard of Joe Smith, yes! When I forgot to treat you like a friend and brother, may the arrow of Redpath pierce my brain!"

"You are sincere, and I will make you the repository of important matters. It will be a relief to share the secrets of the night with one whom I am sure will not betray me."

The partisan then narrated the incidents already placed before the reader, reserving to himself the privilege of representing Mignon in a way as favorable to her as the case would possibly admit. Of his passion for her, he said nothing; indeed, he was not willing to acknowledge the existence of such a sentiment, even to himself; and the pains he took to conceal it, served to awaken suspicions in the mind of the trapper, and point to the truth.

"A reg'lar conspiracy; very curious consarn—lucky thing that you watched Monsieur Mariot. I concluded there was sumthin' wicked in him, while I lay listenin' among the packs and saddles to his grand talk about gold discoveries, and the castle of Montezuma, which is a humbug. The villain has used a good deal of nat'ral cunning in layin' his plans, but the tables may be turned on him, notwithstandin'. The heathen reptile with the bow is arter him,

and he'll leave some of his men behind him, even as you have. The devil takes care of his own, it is said; if it wasn't so, we might expect to hear some day that Monsieur Mariot had felt the sharp point of the steel arrow."

"He will return before morning, hoping his absence has not been noticed," said Brion, very earnestly.

"He will come back to conduct Headley and his friends to the Casa Montezuma, and the land of treasure. How shall you receive him, cap'n?"

"I have not matured my plan, yet. Indeed, I am much disturbed and confused by the extraordinary things that have—providentially, let me believe—fallen under my observation. I need time to reflect—to resolve on a course of conduct that shall be the most judicious, the best for my employers, my men, and, lastly, myself; for self, friend Buckeye, in an affair like this, ought to come last, and not be made to occupy the first place in my thoughts. Danger encircles me like a belt; but men have been in more precarious positions, and lived to tell the story of their escape; thus may it be with me. There are some veterans in my party that I can rely on; they will not fail me, I trust, in an emergency. We can deal with the Blackfeet warriors. A surprise would be disastrous, extremely; but that peril is now comparatively small. To know an enemy's order of battle is to know how to meet him. With your aid, it will be difficult for a war party of an hundred to approach our camp without discovery. I count you a dozen ordinary men; because you have much experience in Indian policy, and know how to look through the double sights."

"That's a compliment I'm proud of, inasmuch as it wasn't said by a common man by way of flattery. Cap'n, I am at your orders from this minute; tell me to do this or that, to reconnoitre, to follow trail, to watch for an enemy by night, to fight till the last gasp, and I'll do it without questions. It's an offer I never made afore; but by the beard of Joe Smith, there's sumthin' in ye I like."

The partisan smiled pleasantly, and held out his hand. Buckeye gave it a rough and hearty grasp, thus sealing the friendly compact which was to last as long as the lives of the parties.

It is now time that we return to Mignon, and take a casual glance at the passage of events somewhat in their regular order. Mariot speedily made Bellmar acquainted with the fact that mademoiselle had repudiated the long talked-of alliance. That gentleman received the information with more calmness than he had anticipated. He told Pierre to be patient; he would see his daughter; he trusted the matter would be satisfactorily arranged; there was no need of excitement; he had skill to manage it properly. Mariot was led to hope in the ultimate surrender of the fair citadel; we will learn how he prospered.

Monsieur Bellmar at length broached the subject gently to Mignon, who demanded to know why he was desirous of such a union. He replied that he was anxious for such a consummation for several reasons.

"Is Monsieur Mariot a man of honor?" she asked.

Bellmar was confused.

"As much so, perhaps, as the average of mankind," he answered.

"Is he possessed of even common honesty?"

"What a strange question, Mignon," he returned, evasively.

"Do you consult my happiness only, in this alliance?" she demanded.

"What else should I consult?"

"Interest—worldly interest, possibly."

"Such a marriage would be advantageous in a pecuniary point of view, I admit."

"Do you fear his anger in case of my refusal?"

"Pierre, you remember, inherited his father's property, which was worth at his decease far more than mine; Pierre wished to enlarge our business, when he succeeded his father in the house, and having considerable money, the savings of my late partner, he made an investment of capital beyond my means; so that, in truth, I am his debtor to a large amount, which might make it exceedingly awkward, should he wish for a dissolution of the house of Bellmar & Mariot."

"But all your resources are not invested; during the many years of your labors, you must have amassed enough to insure you a competence?"

"I have laid by something for you, my child, which you shall have."

"Well, then, my father, let us be content. Pierre is a villain; and I will not consent to be united to a bad man. Whenever you are closeted with him, you should pray: 'Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil.'"

"One would think you had been listening?" he exclaimed, with a pleasure.

"And correctly, too; for I happened to be in the room adjoining the library, at the time of your interview with Pierre in regard to the American Fur Company."

"And you heard all?" cried Bellmar, excited.

"All, my father. And I heard also—what you did not—the development of his scheme."

"The following day, with three men?"

"Yes. Can you now say to me: 'My daughter, I wish you to marry Monsieur Mariot, for he is a worthy man.'"

Bellman pressed his hands to his forehead, and made no answer.

Mignon related circumstantially all that had transpired at the interview between Mariot, Grenier, Kincaid, and Gardette, to which her auditor listened without once looking at her, or changing his attitude.

"Is all this villany to transpire without one effort to prevent it?" Mignon asked, with ingenuous warmth, when the narration was completed.

"What can be done? Mariot will act as he pleases," said Bellmar.

"What, will you suffer yourself to be compromised in character by the machinations of a bad man? Do you not see that his evil scheming must sooner or later become known? Too many persons have his secrets in possession, each of whom would betray him for a few dollars. Are you then to connive at murder, my dear father? Are you to be the accomplice of assassins?"

Mignon spoke earnestly, and Bellmar began to be startled by her representations.

"Indeed, you move me, Mignon. I had not considered the subject in a light so serious."

"Your hair, my father, is already silvery. Would you add crime to age, and die with the dark mark of Cain upon your brow? Act while there is time, I entreat of you!"

"I am powerless, powerless! Mariot has sent his emissaries: they are far upon their way. I cannot overtake them, if I would; for you know, Mignon, that the fire and energy of youth has departed years ago. I regret what he has done, extremely; his plans are both rash and wicked: *Mon Dieu*, my child, I am troubled."

"Now you speak according to the dictates of nature and religion, and your voice is pleasant. Ah, if you listen to Pierre, you will leave me but a legacy of infamy!"

"But what can I do, girl?"

"Dissolve all connection with Mariot, even at a great pecuniary sacrifice. Let him withdraw his capital—suffer him to do his worst—the law will protect you; you will be a gainer to rid yourself of him at any price."

"I believe that is the truth, Mignon. Worldly interests may have blinded my eyes, but do you think I am a very bad man at heart, my daughter?"

"Oh, no; at heart you are good; therefore, you should not be unequally yoked with an unbeliever in human virtue, a contemner of honesty, a scoffer at religion, an apostate from honor. Say you will try to save Brion's party from destruction, and let the house of Bellmar & Mariot fall? How your gray hairs would look at the bar of justice! how your head would droop with shame under the heavy pressure of guilt!"

"Perhaps Mariot will relent."

"But you have said it is already too late; he has sent hired assassins to dog the honest partisan, to cut off men engaged in a lawful calling."

"Parbleu! woman's instincts are said to be quick and true; come, what shall I do?"

"You will trust it to me?"

"I will trust it to you."

"And you will allow me money, and whatever you may wish."

Mignon embraced her father, who went on to say that business would compel him to go to St. Louis, to be absent three weeks; but he trusted in her discretion, having no fears that she would be guilty of follies.

"Your mind," he continued, "is fertile in expedients, while mine has lost the greater part of its strength and vigor. I am willing, I am more than willing—I am anxious that

Pierre's designs should be thwarted. But Brion has gone; where, I know not. We hoped our party would be in advance of him, but his activity has outdone us. If Brion is at Fort Leavenworth, a faithful messenger might be sent to warn him to be on his guard—without compromising myself or Mariot. A few vague hints judiciously thrown out would be sufficient, without calling names, or indicating the precise nature of the danger."

"Was not Captain Brion here a week ago?"

"Yes, he was after men; but most of them being already engaged by me, he left the same day, and since that time, has passed through all the frontier towns of any note, in search of hunters and trappers. And this is why it is so difficult to find him."

"When will your band be ready to start?"

"In ten days."

"Numbering how many men?"

"One hundred."

"And commanded by—"

"Captain Callard."

The foregoing conversation led to that extraordinary resolution which resulted in the pilgrimage of Mignon, in male attire, to the western wilds. She hoped to find the partisan at Fort Leavenworth, make such communication as she might without directing suspicion toward her father, and return without a protracted absence. She waited her father's departure with impatience, that she might put her plan into execution, but he delayed it day after day. Ten days elapsed before he set out for St. Louis, and even then Callard had not secured his complement of men.

Mignon abandoned the expectation of finding Brion at Fort Leavenworth, so much time had passed since he left Westport—therefore determined upon that course of conduct which finally introduced her to the reader on the prairies.

Having once formed the project, she set about preliminary operations with an earnestness that conquered obstacles, and a foresight that would not have been discreditable to a veteran trapper. Her perspicacity owed much of its acuteness, however, to observation, derived from the associations which her father's business naturally threw around her. From her earliest recollections she had seen hunters and trappers, heard their tales of adventure; they were a class whose habits and peculiarities were most familiar. She knew the nature of the perils that attended them in their long excursions, amid the rugged and snowy mountains, what kind of an outfit they needed, their mode of travelling and defence; and lastly, how, when, and where they practiced their trade.

Balaam was a faithful servant, who had been many years in the family. It was the particular wish of Madame Bellmar, at the time of her decease (which was when Mignon was but a child), that Balaam should always be considered a member of the household, and be treated with kindness—which desire had been strictly observed and respected. Balaam was not, as the reader may be inclined to conjecture, feeble and in his dotage, but robust, and a giant in strength. At fifty years, with power undiminished by hardship and abuse, he was at the best period of his manhood. Mignon found in him an able coadjutor—after she had overcome his scruples and silenced his objections—for Balaam had twice been to Bellmar's trading house in the country of the Nez Percés.

When her preparations were completed, she proceeded to Fort Leavenworth, accompanied by this faithful friend and servant. Brion had departed.

The description of the slender youth, in the opening chapter, precludes the necessity of describing Mignon's appearance when she joined the trappers at Fort Leavenworth. Previous to starting, she wrote an affectionate letter for her father—who two days before had left for St. Louis, placing it where he would be sure to find it. The advent of Mignon among the hunters was looked upon by Callard with suspicion; she soon perceived that she was watched; and deprecated from her heart that selfish interest that fills the human soul with distrust.

"Balaam," said Mignon, "is there not something you wish to say to me?"

"Dar is, Massa Crevier," replied Balaam.

"Well, there is no one in hearing; proceed."

"Does ye see dat fire ober dar?"

"Yes, Balaam."

"Whose fire dat is, ye spect?"

Mignon answered that she could form no supposition, whatever.

Balaam informed her that Captain Brion was encamped there for the night.

"Alone?" inquired Mignon.

Balaam replied in the affirmative, explaining that his party were in advance, he having left Fort Leavenworth but a few hours before Callard began his march.

"I must speak to Captain Brion," added Mignon.

"Dat am diffikilt," quoth Balaam.

"Do you think we are watched?"

"Ebry minit, Missy Mignon."

"Hush! call me Master Crevier. I will put this matter to the test. I will walk leisurely from the camp, and you will remain here. If I need you, I will discharge my rifle, the use of which you have so well taught me. If I am followed, you will be sure to observe the circumstance."

The fire to which Balaam had cited Mignon's attention, was distant nearly half a mile, but on account of an intervening valley did not seem half so far.

She left the encampment, advancing with mingled emotions of timidity and heroism. How novel was her situation! What unfriendly constructions her conduct might bear! But she arose superior to weakness; she felt a strength that surprised herself, and prayed that those might be forgiven whose unhappy temperament it is to think evil of others. She would save her aged father from becoming partaker of another's sins—from sharing another's crime. That was just—that was praiseworthy—that was right—and all the sophistry in the world could not make right wrong. She grew strong in moral power, a shield of protection was over, above, around her. Her fears were dispelled by the strength of virtue, and the consciousness of truth.

Mignon heard steps, and looking around, saw Captain Callard following her. She paused upon a gentle eminence—the same where she first appeared to the reader. It has been shown how she reached the bivouac of Brion, meeting with a reception from that worthy man, which, though civil, was not cordial.

Mignon's calmness was severely shaken by the trapper's coldness, which caused her to realize but too sensibly the peculiar awkwardness of her position. To conceal her feelings, she assumed that thoughtful, abstracted air which we noted in the proper place, such a mood giving her a natural pretext for averting her face from the mountaineer. She had flattered herself that she could meet Brion unshrinkingly, and warn him of the danger impending without effort or hesitation; but now she found herself overwhelmed by innumerable scruples, and a diffidence quite unaccountable.

She was observed, too; Callard was behind a tree, not fifty yards distant; he showed himself to Mignon, with his right forefinger upon his lips, and his left held up in menace; this pantomime signified that she should be silent. She was cruelly embarrassed; but a remarkable power of self-control kept her outwardly calm. She resolved not to be thwarted; when she had sufficient command over her voice, she said, without changing her meditative attitude or expression:

"Captain Brion, there is danger near you; I have come to put you upon your guard; but I am watched; a man behind yonder tree is almost near enough to hear my voice."

Mignon waited for a response; the mountaineer was already asleep, while Captain Callard was drawing nearer. She arose to go, when, to her horror, she discovered a serpent winding its unsightly body into a coil, three paces from the partisan's head. To seize a long lagot and dispatch the loathsome creature, was the work of a moment only; she marvelled at her own promptitude and boldness as soon as the deed was accomplished. Excited and trembling, she hurried from the spot to meet Balaam, who was approaching. Eluding Callard, she returned to the encampment, glad that her feeble hand had been the instrument of Providence in the preservation of the trapper.

It was after this partial failure that Mignon resolved on another experiment. As has been anticipated, it was through her agency that the hatchet had been left where it would fall into the hands of Brion, the dumb bearer of a concealed message. Balaam had been trusted with that commission, and despite the espionage of Callard, succeeded in discharging it successfully by adroit management. Mignon had enjoined on him to be careful that a portion of

the slip of paper be left visible, that it might immediately be seen by the finder—~~an~~ item which he so far overlooked, that, as we have seen, it was several days before it attracted the partisan's attention. To mystify the latter, Balaam had adopted the expedient of breaking the trail by grasping a mammoth vine that hung pendant from a tree, and swinging himself forward across a small gully where the ground was hard; this was why the trapper was baffled.

By a skillful manœuvre, Mignon evaded the vigilance of Callard, after the two bands had passed Fort Laramie, and joining the partisan, conversed with him in the manner related, not doubting but her warning had been read and understood; or, at least sufficiently comprehended to make the captain so cautious as to frustrate the designs of his enemies. She wished on that occasion to speak to him freely; but, unfortunately, she confounded Buckeye with Gardette, the half-breed, who was acting for Mariot; and hence her silence on the subject ever uppermost in her thoughts.

While she was planning an expedient to rid herself of his presence, Balaam appeared in the distance, motioning her to return to the party, inasmuch as her absence was exciting inquiry—a series of signals previously agreed upon. We are now ready to tell what happened to Mignon after her unexpected interview with Monsieur Mariot.

CHAPTER VIII.

MIGNON MEETS RAVENCLAW.

Mignon loved liberty. Nothing could be more repugnant to her feelings than the idea of personal restraint, especially when exercised by a man whose character she detested. To remain with the band and be subject to the authority of Pierre Mariot, was a contingent entirely abhorrent to her notion of her own rights and privileges. It was also at variance with her instinctive delicacy to be brought again into contact with those who already knew or mistrusted her sex; who could neither understand her motives nor pity her confusion. To avoid being so awkwardly and painfully placed—an object, perchance, of rude comment and ridicule—to evade Mariot's vigilance and escape his domination, became her ruling desire. In the event of success, should she throw herself upon the protection of Brion, or attempt to return home across the wide prairies, attended by Balaam only? The first was not without objections, but it appeared most safe and feasible. Mignon believed it would be best to act upon her determination promptly, while Mariot was still laboring under surprise, before he had artfully deliberated, arranged his plan of action, and systematized his espionage over her conduct.

During her pilgrimage, Mignon had nightly been protected by a small tent, which Balaam had provided for that purpose, and which he was expert in putting up and taking down. The tent had two compartments, in the smaller of which slept Balaam, like a faithful watchdog, ever on the alert, ready to start up for her defence at the first approach of danger. He kindled and kept the fires also, when fires were needful, cooking with skill, preparing the choicest cuts of venison for his adventurous young mistress.

So it will hence be seen that Mignon passed the time, when not on the march, quite by herself, apart from the motley mixture of men composing Callard's band. The services of Balaam were many and important. His advice was always seasonable; she trusted in his sagacity, anticipating protection from his strong arm in every emergency which might occur. He was proud of her confidence, willing to make any sacrifice that human creature could, to insure her safety and comfort. Balaam was well armed, and hardly it would fare with him who should have the temerity to insult Mignon. He was not wholly indebted to those deadly implements in vogue, for the means of assault and vengeance, because Nature had gifted him with hands of remarkable strength, with which to crush an adversary, and administer corporeal pain. Balaam was of a patient, genial disposition, but when a quarrel was forced upon him, and his feelings were outraged, he was an antagonist greatly to be feared. Those so unfortunate as to feel the stunning power of his fist repented their rashness, and cared not to provoke his ire again.

Balaam was consulted in reference to the emergency that had arisen. She explained to him her reasons for not wishing to remain with the party, which, in his view, were sufficiently cogent; indeed, her mere will would have been considered imperative, without a single argument. She said to him:

"We can escape more readily to-night than to-morrow, or any subsequent period."

"Dat am a fack," quoth Balaam.

"Come, my friend," she continued, "how shall it be done?"

"I want to know just where yer gwine when yer git away dat's de question dat 'quires splainin'."

"Perhaps I shall throw myself upon the protection of Captain Brion."

"The man you—"

"The man I—what, Balaam?" said Mignon, sharply, coloring.

"Nuffin of no consequence," replied Balaam.

"Don't 'sturb me; I'm thinkin' how it can be done."

"I'll wait patiently."

The African remained silent for some five minutes.

"We shall want our hosses," he said, at length.

Mignon assented.

"Well, dis chile must crawl out dar 'mongst 'em, cut de side-lines, and lead 'em off softly, while you creep away in nuther direction."

"Yes, Balaam."

"Den I jines ye wid de hosses, ober dar by dem cotton-woods."

"Suppose you should be discovered?"

"Dis culled feller fight—git away. I'll meet ye dare, sure, 'twixt dis and morain'—pervidin you git dar."

"That I can do, believe me. You see I am small—I can move quietly. Look out, and observe what is going on."

Balaam did as bidden, reporting that most of the party were gathered around the dead body of Grenier, but he could hear voices in Callard's tent.

"The fate of that man was sudden and awful; but I imagined I saw in his death the hand of retributive justice," said Mignon.

"Redpath am about," said the black, in an under tone.

"Yes, it would really seem that there is such a personage; he was spoken of by that very man as a fitting terror to unloose upon Captain Brion's party, but his evil thought has reacted on him; yonder he lies lifeless, translated in a moment from this world to the other, with his sins upon him—with his many unrepented sins weighing darkly upon him."

Mignon paused, arrested possibly by the thought that the same peril attended her, wherever she might wander in the mountains.

"Did you remark, Balaam, that the half-breed was much affected by fear? I recognized him immediately, as one of the three men in the service of Mariot—one of the trio from whose rudeness I was saved by the brave mountaineer. Not long since I confounded him with another, who was a better man, undoubtedly."

"Dere, missy, I've forgot sev'ral 'portant 'tic'lars!" exclaimed Balaam, without heeding Mignon's last remarks. "Here's our tent and baggage; can't get along 'thout 'em."

"I know they are useful, but necessity compels us to leave them."

The black looked around and shook his head—equivalent to a declaration that he must have them at any risk. Mignon gave him to understand that she would confide the matter wholly to his discretion, having unshaken faith in his prudence.

"And now," she resumed, "is it not time for me to go?"

Balaam went out and reconnoitered once more, coming back with the report that there was a fair prospect of success, as the attention of the band was still directed to the subject of Grenier's death; while Mariot and Callard were yet talking earnestly—as he learned, by listening in the vicinity of the parties.

"I hate to have ye try it," said Balaam, "cause it's dangerous-like, and dars no knowin' what'll happen; but if ye've made up yer mind to it, why, I s'pose you must. De Lord knows what'll come ob all dis, for I doesn't; but I'll stick to ye long as I've de breff ob life. Now, go and manage it de best ye can, and I'll watch yer as long as I can see ye."

Mignon left the tent; a single glance over the encampment assured her that the moment was favorable. Moving quickly, her figure was soon lost to Balaam's view in the shadow of the hill, at the base of which lay the valley.

Five minutes after, he saw her near the cotton-woods, and was certain she would reach it without discovery, which she did.

It was then two hours past midnight. The moon was waning, and the stars seemed to look down through a mist of silver. The mountains were grim and cold, the snows on their summits gleaming faintly and weirdly in the pale light.

To Mignon's imagination the view appeared like giant castles, with lofty towers, gloomy bastions, and rugged turrets. The defiles were moats, spanned by drawbridges kept by genii. Feelings of awe stole upon Mignon as she cast her eyes towards those mighty barriers. The mightiness of Nature, the grandeur of her works, humbled her heart. The everfamished prairie-dogs fled at her advance, stopping at a little distance to look back and redouble their cries; while occasionally, in the distance, a troop of wolves howled their hideous notes. Though inured to these sounds, Mignon—now that she was alone—if not absolutely terrified, was startled and nervous. There followed her also an unpleasant remembrance of what had occurred that night directly before her, as well as incidents of a similar nature that had happened in Brion's band. As others had asked, so did Mignon, "Who is Redpath?"

Her better judgment told her that Redpath was a savage, cunning and deadly, and that was all. But why were his movements so secret, his step so noiseless, his approaches so mysterious? Easy questions to answer. He was secret because success depended upon secrecy; his step noiseless, for the reason that he adopted extraordinary precautions; his approaches mysterious, as the combined result of long practice and skill. Redpath, then, was but a stealthy Indian, more malevolent than his brethren, hence, more terrible. He was daring, persevering and adroit; but perhaps he might yet find an adversary as daring, persevering, and adroit as he. He was but a savage, daubed with paint, and full of subtlety; he would doubtless fall, ultimately, by the ball of an American woodsman, and his name and fame only survive.

Thus reflected Mignon, trying to suppress those fears which were natural to the time and place, and in which something very like superstition blended. Say what we may to the contrary, the strongest minds have an undercurrent of superstition, and the sturdiest scoffers at the marvellous find a substratum of supernaturalism in their souls. This is a truism that the "atheist's laugh" and the infidel's ridicule cannot overthrow. It is a good thing for man that there is such a susceptibility within him; it is the only avenue through which to convince him of the existence of a Supreme Power, and a conscious life hereafter. Mignon formed no exception to the general body of humanity, in this respect; and though the name of Redpath had at first presented as a fabled terror, she shared, unconsciously almost, in the prevailing sentiment of the trappers, hunters and voyageurs—that Redpath was a being somewhat between human and devilish.

Near the cotton-woods where she was to wait the coming of Balaam, was a crevasse or gully, the entrance to which was more deeply pictured in shadow. Its slides were jagged and high, worn and torn (formerly) by a strong stream of water that tumbled from the lower ranges in a season of rain. At the top, at the very edges of the crevasse, their roots exposed and robbed of soil, stood some trees of pinon, cypress, and birch, bending their sickly tops over the chasm. The place, lonely and sombre as it was, appeared to offer to Mignon a safe retreat until the black should join her. With a step that faltered, lacking its wonted firmness, she passed into the gloom of the crevasse. It was cooler there—the night wind breathing through as it crept from the hills. Walking on, she came to a deep dell or basin—a spot of rare obscurity—of which we have had occasion to speak. Beyond were a series of elevations extending to the base of the Wind River chain of the Rocky Mountains.

Mignon paused in that solitude. How complete was her isolation! she seemed alone on the face of the globe, or the only inhabitant of a new world. Hundreds of miles distant were the familiar objects of childhood, scenes indelibly impressed in memory, home, with its tender associations and kindred beloved. Why was she in that isolation? Why had she cast aside the trammels of her sex, and betaken to such a quixotic adventure? To save her father from participation in crime, and to secure, if possible, the safety of Captain Brion, was the

never varying response which she gave to those questions. Her father's name always came first, afterward Brion's; that order agreed better with her delicacy. How would the sententious world interpret all this? the world with such a severe sense of decorum—the world which reaches just as far as one's name and fame, and no farther—all beyond being a blank!

"Fear not!" said a voice.

Mignon recoiled and cried out in alarm; beside her stood a tall and motionless figure.

"Be not afraid, pale-face."

The speaker was an Indian of majestic height. With his arms folded upon his breast, he stood looking calmly at Mignon.

"Stand up like a man, and do not tremble like a woman. Ravenclaw strikes not such as thou! Thy chin is smooth, thy heart is soft, and there is no power in thy arm to harm my race."

The voice of the red man was deep and musical; it came from his broad chest without effort. His eyes were dark and piercing as those of the eagle; it seemed to Mignon that she became transparent before him, and he had to look at her only, to see what was passing within. His bearing was dignified to a notable degree. He spoke the English as though it been his vernacular.

"The vagabond prairie-dog has a home, the fox a covert, and the wild wolf's whelp a den; but thou, O son of a mighty nation, art shelterless," added the Indian.

"Take the goat from the mountains, the buffalo from the prairies, the wild horse from the pampas, the fish from the water, and thee from the dwellings of thy kindred. Each thing and creature loves its element; therefore the goat stays on the mountain; the buffalo on the prairie, the wild horse on the pampas, the fish in the water; wherefore art thou here?"

"You say well; you speak according to Nature; but it would take long to tell you, son of the eagle, why I am in the country which the Master of Life has given to the red man," replied Mignon, reassured by the lofty yet kindly manner of the native.

Ravenclaw walked a few paces from Mignon, and addressed some one in his own dialect: immediately she heard steps hurrying away. Ravenclaw returned to his former place; but, as he did not speak, she followed his example. In a short time—it was long to Mignon—an Indian woman appeared with a bundle.

"Follow her, and do as she bids you," said Ravenclaw, pointing to the woman; he then spoke to the latter in his own tongue, who, making a gesture to Mignon, proceeded to cross the dell. There Mignon perceived a hut, and entered it, in obedience to the signs of her guide. The woman lighted a pine torch by some embers that were glowing upon a hearth of stone. Thrusting the end of the torch into the earth, she unrolled the bundle. The maiden's cheek crimsoned!—the bundle contained female wearing apparel of Indian style, which might have belonged to an Indian belle, so elaborately was it made, and so tastefully ornamented with those products esteemed graceful and becoming by tawny dames and red damsels.

The Blackfoot woman pointed to Mignon's clothes, and said, "Take off;" then to the garments which she had brought, and added, "Put on."

The eyes of Ravenclaw had penetrated her disguise. Was her artifice so transparent to this son of the mountains? Had Nature indeed gifted him with keener instincts than the child of cities, the pampered creature of civilization? Was she a prisoner? What were his intentions? Such queries ran rapidly through her mind, while mechanically she obeyed the commands of the woman.

A notable change was soon made in Mignon's appearance, and one that was far from displeasing. We cannot picture fully to the reader's imagination the effect of this novel costume (wrought, as it was, in the height of Indian art), or note the various articles of which it was composed—nor is it needful. We will say, however, *en passant*, that Mignon's small foot did not look less pretty for the substitution of a more elegant moccasin, nor her ankle less dainty for the fringed leggins. Her toilet was not considered complete till her cheeks were stained with paint, and her hands also. The woman then spread some skins upon the ground before the tent, and Ravenclaw, seeing her with Mignon, approached.

"Daughter of the pale-face," he said, "I am of a warlike race, but I do not war upon

women. Now, tell me why you are here? I will listen—my ears are open."

Mignon understood at once that the wishes of the man in whose presence she stood were commands, and not to be disregarded.

"It were better," she answered, with tact, "that I remain silent before a great chief and a mighty warrior, as thy lofty bearing proclaims thee to be. I have called thee son of the eagle, because the eagle is a noble bird, with a daring spirit, proud plumage, and eyes that are not dazzled by the sun. Pass on, thou of the strong wing, nor stoop in thy flight to notice the sparrow that flies not so high, nor emulates thy deeds."

"I said my ears were open; they are, but I hear nothing. Are you speaking, Lilyface?" he said, somewhat haughtily.

"You have called me Lilyface, because the pale blood of my nation betrays itself in my countenance. It is a good name—I like it; I will teach my people to call me thus, should I live to return. Listen, chief: the lodge of Lily-face is away on the border, with a hundred prairies and rivers between. She has journeyed many days to reach the hunting-grounds of the Blackfoot. You have asked why she came! Keep your ears open, and you shall hear."

Mignon, in that style pleasing to an Indian's fancy, acquainted him with those particulars which influenced her movements. She spoke of Brion; described the character of Pierre Mariot, finally unfolding his entire plan. Ravenclaw remained calm and unmoved; while Mignon watched his face in vain to note the effect of her story. The incidents of the march were not passed over, but related in their appropriate connection. When she finished, Ravenclaw was in possession of the more important matters contained in the foregoing pages.

"A curse is upon your nation," said Ravenclaw. "That curse is the love of yellow dust; it turns them into greedy wolves; they howl and tear each other, and are never at rest. They die by the way; their graves lie along the line of march. It is well; the Great Spirit has sent it upon them. They tremble at the name of Redpath—his deeds strike them dumb; they become as women—they grow pale, like squaws, when the avenger is abroad—when the silent feet of the unknown pursues—when his steps are in the mountains, and in the defiles. Lily-face, so perish thy race!"

"And wherefore?" asked Mignon.

"Because they are pushing us over the mountains into the sea. Fish live in the sea, but men cannot. But we have turned on our pursuers like the hunted buffalo, and will go over the snowy ranges, fighting and bleeding, and staining the cliffs with blood. Our old men may die, and be buried in sight of the glorious hunting-ground of the Blackfoot nation; but our young men and our children will fall in arms, or perish ignobly by the sounding shores of the great waters."

Mignon looked earnestly at Ravenclaw, and believed that the prophet-heart was beating in his swelling bosom.

"Home and country are as sacred to the red man as the white. There is but one God, Lily-face, and he is as much the God of the Indian as the white man," added Ravenclaw, in tones that thrilled Mignon.

"You are right!" she exclaimed. "You are my brother; there is but one humanity, one people, one race. The soul of a hero flashes from your eyes; the voice of truth speaks through you; the cause of the Indian is just. Yes, Ravenclaw, you are leaving a fair heritage—it is slipping from you; your way is, indeed, over the mountains—your children's graves will be the sea."

"And the great and awful Master of Life will avenge us on a proud and rapacious nation!" cried Ravenclaw, with reverential fervor. "He will smite your people—he will sweep them away with the power of his mighty arm. He will remember the wrongs of the red man long after the red man has become extinct; and, in his tremendous wrath, he will arise and shake heaven and earth; your stars shall fall, and your bloody eagle shall shriek for help!"

Ravenclaw stretched out his hand, and his expression was sublime. Mignon was awed; she felt a compassion for the red race that moved her to tears.

"You do well to weep, daughter of a doomed people; even warriors have dropped tears like women, and wiped them from their faces with bloody hands."

Ravenclaw's arm fell to his side, his chin sunk upon his breast, and he stood panting for breath; another pang would have broken his heart.

Mignon did not speak—she dared not interrupt a grief so sublime. She waited for his kingly spirit to grow calm. When he addressed her again, his emotion had subsided, and his tones were subdued to kindness, almost tenderness.

"But I have spoken to you as if you were a warrior, and not a woman. You are not guilty for the sins of your nation—you shall not suffer. Love has made you daring, or your voice would not have been heard in this valley. Wear the garments you have on; they become your sex better, and you are safer in them. Take this, and wear it always in sight; it will keep you from harm when others are ready to perish."

The chief gave Mignon a raven, wrought in beads upon a piece of dressed otter skin; she fastened it upon her breast.

"I will wear it," she said, "in remembrance of a generous chieftain; it shall be my only talisman."

"Go to the wigwams of my nation," resumed Ravenclaw. "Your frame is too tender to go yonder, where the mountain-tops are covered with snows. Remain, and in a few moons you shall be conducted safely, and with an escort of warriors, to one of the great forts of your people. This false-hearted Mariot, this craven Frenchman, shall feel the power he has invoked; he shall die as he deserves, and his hireling dogs shall share in his downfall. Though I slay my enemies, I protect the good, the beautiful, whom the Master of Life has made to love, and not to destroy. You are not such as smite my brethren; your foot is not such as goes on the war-path, nor your voice such as shouts the battle-cry of the pale-faces; therefore, you live and speak to Ravenclaw. Think not that justice and humanity dwell with the white men only; they have habitations in forests, and in the hearts of men called savages."

"The heart of Lily-face beats with gratitude; the generosity of Ravenclaw fills her with wonder and admiration; yet she loves her people, nor would remain in the lodges of the Blackfoot nation, because her father's spirit would grow heavy with sorrow, and her kindred would mourn her as one dead. Let Lily-face depart in peace to join the hunters of the mountains."

A cloud rested upon the brow of the Indian.

"I thought to save you from danger, but you refuse to be thus saved. Think again. Would you see the tomahawk and scalping-knife crimsoned with the blood of your people? Would you see them falling like leaves, with no power to aid them?"

"God knows I would see no such horrors!" exclaimed Mignon.

"Remain, and you shall be as safe as if by the fireside of your father's wigwam."

"I doubt it not—I doubt it not!" she replied.

"Yet your heart is near the chief of the white trappers," said Ravenclaw, after a pause. "Be it so, you shall go to him in safety if it takes all my warriors to conduct you; yet I swear by the Great Spirit that not a hair of your head shall fall if you stay."

"You have inspired me with such confidence," returned Mignon, "that your word is to me like that of the Master of Life. If I were weary, and you said to me, 'Lie down there and sleep in safety,' I would do so, and rest without troubled dreams."

Mignon smiled sweetly, and held out her hand to Ravenclaw. He took it, and held it a moment in his own. He did not utter his thoughts, his lips were closed, his face calm—though the sternness of its expression was gone; but his breathing grew quick, shaking his broad chest with its vehemence. Who shall tell what strong feeling was wrestling with his proud spirit, and how nobly he mastered himself?

"Lilyface," he said, in tones that welled up from his soul, "you make me think better of your race. I will not forget you, I will think of you till I go to the land of spirits where my fathers have gone. Look up and see the stars, and remember, many moons from now, when you stand again near the wigwams of your kindred and behold them shining—thou hast seen them once in a far off country, and with the chief of a hunted people beside you. In his dreams, Ravenclaw has heard a voice like thine: but after to-night it will be heard save

in dreams only. Lilyface, daughter of my enemies, we meet because it was the will of the Great Spirit, and we part because it is also his will."

Ravenclaw relinquished Mignon's hand, repeating, in a voice of deepest melancholy: "We meet—we part!"

"We may meet again in the land of souls," said Mignon.

"The red man and the white will be forever distinct," resumed Ravenclaw.

"In that country to which we are going, all nations will forget their earthly differences. Enemies will be reconciled, races will blend, and kindreds and families and people mingle happily," returned Mignon.

"Never!" exclaimed the chief. "The soul of a red man and the soul of a white will remain eternally unlike each other; their desires and instincts are not the same."

"The revelations of that mysterious life are hidden from our eyes; we see darkly, and know imperfectly; but the beneficent hand of the Great Spirit will remove the veil, and at death we shall discern more clearly, and think more comprehensively. Chief of a powerful nation, adieu till then!"

"Be it so—it is decreed; and what is decreed cannot be changed. Our paths have been approaching each other since the hour our lives commenced; but having met, after to-night they will forever diverge. Daughter of the paleface, a voice calls you away; leave my sight—go, go!"

Ravenclaw drew his form to a loftier height, and assumed a sterner expression. Mignon took a ring from her finger, and placing it in his hand, said:

"It is the gift of Lilyface—keep it."

Ravenclaw held the glittering jewel between his thumb and finger.

"This will be more precious to me than my life," he replied. "I will wear it on my breast, where it shall feel the motion of my heart as long as it beats. It shall be with me when I sleep and when I awake; it shall go with me to battle, my hands shall grasp it when I die. In years to come, should the plough of the white man disturb my bones, they will eat up this gift. And now go, go! You shall hear no more the voice of Ravenclaw."

Mignon hastened away; at the distance of a few paces she paused and waved her hand, but Ravenclaw stood immovable, and made no sign.

CHAPTER IX.

BRION'S NUMBERS ARE DIMINISHED.

Brion's camp was astir very early in the morning. The hunt was to be resumed, and the hunters wished to be seasonably in the saddle. Headley and his party, excited by their new hopes and schemes, were among the first to awake. They had dreamed of a golden harvest, and the "Casa Montezuma." The partisan had not betaken to his blanket until nearly daylight, and weary with his vigils, he was yet slumbering.

Mariot was not to be seen. The gold-seekers, drawn together by sympathy of feeling, were cooking their breakfast very amicably. Inquiries were made respecting the absence of the grand projector of the new enterprise—Headley only appearing undisturbed by the circumstance, he was very naturally looked to for light upon the subject.

"He left us last night," said Headley, in a low tone. "He came to see me before he went, and instructed me what to do. 'If I don't return,' he said, 'before morning, you need not expect me, but fall back to the Red Buttes with as many as have the courage to follow you, where we will arrange everything to mutual satisfaction.' This was what he told me."

Headley arose with a determined look.

"I am one that goes, who will follow?" he added, glancing inquiringly at his friends.

"Let us go for our horses," said Conroy.

"Agreed, agreed!" cried a dozen voices.

"To the Red Buttes—to the Red Buttes!"

Buckeye was passing the malecontents, and heard enough to understand what was going forward; he ran and aroused Brion from sleep.

"Come, cap'n, it's time for you to act; the Headley and Dorelle party are deserting."

Brion was instantly upon his feet and walking toward the horses, which, having eaten their fill, were lying down.

"Ain't you goin' to call out some of the men to help you?" said Buckeye.

"No, I can help myself!" said the partisan, firmly.

He found Headley bridling a horse, and others preparing to do the same.

"Men," said Brion, "these animals belong to the American Fur Company; you cannot take them."

Headley was confused.

"What!" he exclaimed, "have we not ridden these horses since the hour we left Fort Leavenworth?"

"So you have had the light of the moon, but I think you do not own the moon," replied Brion, quietly.

"We have ridden these animals, we have called them ours, we have groomed and cared for them, and we shall take them!" rejoined Headley, raising the saddle from the ground.

"Stop!" thundered the partisan, "do not add robbery to unmanly conduct. Everything you see here is in my charge, and I will spend the last drop of my blood in its defence! Go, if you will, in search of the Casa Montezuma, and the fabulous treasures of the Valley of the Gila, but go as you are. You shall not plunder my camp for the benefit of your mad schemes. Had you made known to me the cause of your dissatisfaction, and informed me of your intentions to abandon my party and seek for treasure in a distant region, I would in turn have dealt frankly with you; I would have told you that you are being duped by a villain; but this is past—you are unworthy of my confidence. Go, and learn by bitter experience that you should deal honestly with all men, not disregard solemn compacts. I see here thirteen, who cease from this moment to be members of my band. Leave us at once, and never return—unless as penitent and reasonable men, desiring protection."

"Protection!" sneered Headley.

"By the beard of Joe Smith!" cried Buckeye, who had followed Brion; "you'll need it!"

"Then doubtless we shall call upon you," returned Conroy.

"Shoulder your rifles, my friends," said Headley, to his adherents.

"To the Red Buttes—to the Red Buttes!" shouted others.

"I pity these misguided men, my anger yields to compassion," said the partisan to Buckeye, in a low tone.

"It's sympathy wasted, cap'n; it isn't in 'em to be wise and prudent, especially while that tall Missourian is among 'em. The quicker you get rid of such fellers the better; for they ain't fit for your business, and never will be," answered Buckeye.

"Though indignant at your conduct, I regret to see you rushing blindfold into new difficulties and dangers. Men, let me warn you to shun Dorelle, and make your way with as much secrecy and expedition as possible to Fort Laramie," resumed Brion, addressing the gold-seekers once more.

"You speak of difficulties and dangers as though there were none attending your expedition, and we were not at this moment turning our backs upon them," said Conroy.

"Once more, my friends—shoulder arms—march! If we cannot have our horses, we can go on foot and trust to luck—and Monsieur Dorelle."

The gold-seekers fell into marching order, and moved off in quite a spirited manner.

"Dim-sighted fools!" exclaimed Buckeye.

"They are marching to destruction!"

"Or to join the Rocky Mountain Fur Company," added Brion.

"They won't do it, even if the alternative be presented; they've got their minds puffed up with ideas of treasure and sudden wealth, and that's a hard notion to get rid of. They'll insist on the original project."

"As long as they think there's any truth in it," said Brion.

"And Mariot won't tell 'em he's lied, in a hurry."

"Well, they have provoked their fate whatever it may be. My party is minus thirteen men; thirteen from seventy-two leaves fifty-nine."

"You've lost thirteen men, but your band isn't weakened; it's strengthened, because the remainder are disciplined somewhat, have experience, and can be commanded. Men that won't be governed ain't the kind for your purpose, cap'n."

While this scene was transpiring, the main body of the party were quietly eating breakfast around their respective fires.

The sun was rising above the level of the

eastern prairies; he came up like a ball of liquid fire. Soft and grateful zephyrs, bearing aromatic odors, breathed around the mountaineer as he walked thoughtfully about the encampment, giving orders. The events of the morning had induced him to change his mind in regard to hunting the buffalo. His camp was in a situation too much exposed to be left in charge of a small party, which would necessarily be the case, should he send out twenty or thirty of his band to hunt. He, therefore, formed the resolution of moving forward to a canon a few miles farther on. Once in possession of the canon, he could hold his ground against a large body of enemies with half his company; but he was suspicious that it was occupied by savages, who were waiting a favorable opportunity to attack them, either while they were hunting or scattered on the march, and unprepared for resistance. This suspicion was produced by what he had heard when listening to the conversation of Mariot and Beavertaker, and the suggestions previously made by the former in regard to his route, he having advised him to keep near the mountains.

Accompanied by Buckeye, Brion mounted and rode toward the canon. It was a fixed principle with the latter, always to take the post of danger, and be the foremost in situations requiring courage and skill. When approaching a place where an enemy was known to be concealed, he asked no one to solve the matter, but settled the question by his own personal bravery and tact. If the front was threatened, he was in the front; if the rear, he was in the rear, taking at once the responsibility and the risk.

"Get up, Flash!" said Buckeye, giving his horse the rein.

While the parties were galloping toward the canon, the clatter of hoofs arrested their attention. The sounds came from beyond a small strip of timber forty or fifty rods ahead, and presently two persons turned the wood and drew in sight.

"Ingins!" exclaimed Buckeye.

"No," replied Brion, "one is a negro."

"And the other is an Ingin woman or gal, or somethin' of that natur'."

"It would seem so," said the partisan, observing the advancing persons sharply. "At all events, their intentions are not hostile," he added.

"By the beard of Smith!" cried Buckeye, "that nigger feller is ridin' the same hoss that that youngster rode who fell in with us 'tother day."

"The resemblance is striking," I confess," returned Brion.

"There's no resemblance about it; it's the same," rejoined the other.

"It is very possible," rejoined the partisan. The objects of these remarks approached.

"Are you lookin', cap'n?" asked Buckeye, in a low voice.

"I am," said Brion.

"Isn't she uncommon? what a face! what a figure! what an eye!"

"Handsome, certainly," returned the partisan.

"Bewitchin', cap'n!" added Buckeye, with increasing enthusiasm.

"Beware that you do not fall in love with this Indian beauty," said Brion, playfully.

"I sha'n't make no promises, 'cause love 'll go where it's sent. Flash, you rascal, prick up your ears and cut a caper!"

Flash, in obedience to his master's mandate, and quickened, perchance, by the spur, reared and caparoled coltishly.

"Now's yer time, cap'n," continued the trapper, "to make an impression. Put on the iron and show off; these Ingin gals are 'mazin fond of horseanship."

"Beavers and otters!" exclaimed Buckeye, "the gal don't ride like one of the heathen riptiles. She sets on sideways jes' like a converted Christian female. Beard of the prophet Smith! but isn't it sing'lar?"

"She sits gracefully, I'm sure," said Brion.

"As a queen!" quoth Buckeye.

If the appearance of the Indian maiden produced such a marked effect upon Buckeye, what must have been the emotions of Brion, who believed that in her he recognized the face and form of Mignon? The wonderful disclosures of the previous night had prepared the way to such a recognition. Having seen the features of Balaam, he was not one to forget them; and he was well assured, by the few words he heard him utter on that occasion, that he would never be found far from his young mistress. The bosom of the mountaineer was agitated by doubt, love, fear, admira-

tion. Mignon approached, while Balaam checked his horse and fell in the rear. When near enough, she raised her eyes, and asked:

"Is not this Captain Brion, the partisan of the American Fur Company?"

"Yes," said Brion, respectfully.

"I have that to say which must be my excuse for appearing before you in this garb, and under circumstances so peculiar," she added, averting her eyes, her cheeks becoming suddenly suffused.

Brion's brave heart beat rapidly. The modesty and heroism of Mignon charmed him. He thought of what she had done, and the dangers she had dared. And for what had she tempted such perils? The query came with stunning force. What but love makes woman bold?

"You need no excuse for appearing before Ben Brion," he replied, with warmth. "Your wishes shall be my commands; you have only to name them. I beg of you to be frank, and trust me as if we had met and established an acquaintance."

Mignon looked inquiringly at the partisan to learn if his words had other significance than what they seemed to have upon their surface.

"My communications will consist simply of vague warnings, which I fear will appear indefinite and unsatisfactory," Mignon resumed.

"Such apprehensions do injustice to my nature," said Brion.

"So I shall endeavor to persuade myself," continued Mignon, with captivating ingenuousness. "I love to think well of humanity; I have pleasure in seeing poor human nature exalted. I will—to employ a Jewish simile—deal frankly and truly with thee, though it may cost me pain and confusion. You wonder why I am here; it is to warn you of the danger of which I have spoken, this is why I am before you."

"For me!" exclaimed Brion, astounded at such a declaration.

"Hear me: the danger which threatened you compromised the honor of one who is dear to me," rejoined Mignon.

If the declaration she had first made filled him with hope, the last avowal dispelled it. One who was "dear to her!" Ah, that must be a lover or a husband!

"You are the victim of a wicked scheme, which has for its object the destruction of your party. The man to whom belongs the pater nity of this plot, will not fail through softness of heart or scruples of conscience."

"May I ask his name?"

"I cannot tell you—it would involve another. If I can defeat him without exposing him, I will."

"He is Pierre Mariot," said Brion.

Mignon grew pale.

"It is too true," she answered. "You have discovered the secret."

"I even know you," resumed the mountaineer.

Mignon looked up in alarm.

"Will you speak my name?" she added.

"Mademoiselle Bellmar; those to whom friendship gives the right to address you familiarly, call you Mignon."

Mignon's face became crimson. A lovelier countenance could not have been presented to the gaze of the mountaineer. His sympathies, his love, his soul itself, seemed to pass over to Mignon. He idealized her perfections, he spiritualized her beauty. The conquest which began at Westport, was now complete. Mignon became all that was divine in woman. Brion wished to kneel at her feet and do homage.

"You are right," she responded, pensively.

"And do you remember that we once met?"

"Well, it was at night; you laid me under obligations which I shall not forget."

"And did you imagine that I could forget, Mademoiselle Bellmar? Pardon my boldness, but your idea has been with me ever since. I have thought of you on the march—I have dreamed of you while sleeping on the prairies. And you are here before me! Oh! this cannot be reality—this is the veriest hallucination!"

At first, Brion fixed his eyes on the maiden's face, but, startled at his own temerity, he allowed them to sink till they rested upon Mignon's little foot. Mademoiselle felt the blood glowing in her cheeks, and dancing through her swelling veins preternaturally quick.

"There will be time for gallant speeches when we meet under different circumstances," she resumed, with dignity, casting off her womanly weakness.

"I crave pardon; but I never speak what I do not mean."

"And what is it that you mean?" she asked, with asperity.

"Since you are offended, I dare not confess. It were more becoming to thank you for the undeserved exertions you have made in my behalf. Mademoiselle, I know not how to clothe my feelings of gratitude in words."

"I will spare you the trouble," said Mignon, with a smile, extending her hand to him.

"I swear, by this hand, to be the most devoted of your friends—to sacrifice life, everything, to secure your safety."

"That is much, and unasked, too; for I did not come like love-lorn damsel seeking adventurous knight."

Mignon pronounced these words with a smile on her lips, but in a tone somewhat indicative of injured pride, which the partisan did not fail to notice.

"I cherish no thoughts or feelings not to your favor," he said, quickly. "I entertain for you the profoundest respect. Never, I trust, will you have reason to blush for word or act of mine, or regret the step you have taken to ward off pressing danger. Chance has already made me acquainted with the nature of the peril that impends. Mariot is indeed a villain, and it is truly unfortunate that a man like Monsieur Bellmar, your father—of whose name I have heard honorable mention—should be connected with him in business."

"No one can regret it more deeply than I; it has long been a source of pain."

"I am willing to absolve Monsieur Bellmar from all participation in this scheme for the destruction of my band, and the injury of my employers."

"You do him no more than justice; he is anxious that the designs of Mariot should come to naught."

"He was acquainted with those designs, it would seem?"

Mignon was embarrassed; she withheld a portion of the truth to screen him from the imputation of guilt.

"I chanced to hear," she said, "a conversation not intended for my ears, which made me a party to his purposes. Being in possession of his secret, it was natural I should disclose it to my father."

"Very true," said Brion, "and for his sake I doubt not you have accomplished this perilous pilgrimage."

"Yes, it is so; you construe me truly and generously. I would do much rather than have my father's name linked with infamy."

"That expression does you much honor, and raises you still higher in my esteem. Having done all you can do, it is probable that you wish to return; is it so?"

"I put myself under your protection until I shall be so fortunate as to meet a party returning from the mountains, then I shall go back."

"To afford you every assistance in my power will be but a meagre testimonial of my gratitude. I have duties to perform requiring my immediate attention, but I will first conduct you to camp."

"Is it far, captain?"

"You see yonder hill; it is at the right of that."

"Then I need not trouble you to go back; Balaam will easily find it."

Brion demurred at this arrangement, but Mignon was firm—insisting that the way was short, and their acquaintance should not commence with taking him from his duties.

"Besides," she added, looking kindly at the black, "Balaam is as good as a regiment." Balaam was flattered; shaking his brawny arm, he declared himself a "host" in the defence of his mistress.

"There's a cretur among us," quoth Buckeye, "that none of us can guard against."

"Redpath?" said Mignon.

"That's the nat'ral varmint I mean," returned Buckeye.

"I do not fear Redpath, even; I wear a charm," Mignon rejoined.

"You wear a good many charms, miss, that are jes' calkulated to turn a feller's head e'enmost," Buckeye replied, casting a furtive glance at the partisan.

"I refer to a special charm," resumed Mignon, blushing, "which will guard me in the hour of danger."

"For me there's no charm like your beauty, miss, and to protect that, I'd stan' afore an army of savage reptiles like Redpath."

"Oh, you are sincere, I'm sure! so I thank you, and will proceed."

"Remember directions—bear well to the right. If no accident occurs, I will be with you soon." Then, to Balaam: "Tell my men that you met their leader, and he expects them to treat this young lady with respect."

"Yes, massa, I'll spoke dat to 'em," said Balaam.

"I was correct," affirmed Buckeye, when Mignon was out of hearing, "about the black boss."

"I think you were, really," Brion replied.

"One thing I should like to know," added the trapper.

"Well?"

"The youngster's name that used to ride the cretur which now carries that dusky heathen."

"Crevier. Confess that you did not like him?"

"He appeared foppish; but between you and I, I mistrusted that it was a woman the minute I put my eyes on him."

"I cannot give you credit for so much perspicacity. Had you been suspicious of her sex, your bearing would have been less repulsive. Your gallantry I cannot doubt, since you passed your compliments upon yonder young lady so adroitly. If you go on in that way, by my faith, Buckeye, you will prove a dangerous rival!"

The trapper drew up his shoulders significantly.

"I didn't mean you should get ahead of me, cap'n, though you're very fluent in speech; but by the beard of Smith! you made a plump declaration!"

"I hope I was not guilty of such folly," said Brion, biting his lip.

"That uncommon cretur would make any man commit indiscretions, cap'n. Them eyes of hern'll shine afore me for the next twenty-four hours like di'mons. And perhaps you didn't notice the little foot, no longer than a doll's?"

"Perhaps not," said the mountaineer, drily.

"Her hands are like fairies' hands," persisted Buckeye.

"You are observing, my friend."

"And her smile is of a heavenly natur," said Buckeye, perseveringly.

"Be quiet; look yonder, just where those bushes skirt the plateau, and tell me if you see aught that is suspicious?"

"I see a motionless object, that seems, from this distance, like a stick or a stone."

"Watch it a moment."

"It moves a little; it's a reptile—one of the onregenerate perductions of this great kentry!"

"Let us move that way; perchance we may stir up a nest of them. I have known one to stand like a fixture, while several of his companions were concealed in the surrounding thickets. It may be thus in the present instance."

Bending somewhat to the left, that their advance might be covered by an arm of timber reaching out into the prairie, the wary trappers approached the suspicious object, which, after all, might prove a wolf or a buffalo; for the space intervening was yet considerable. Keeping a careful watch in every direction where they supposed it possible an enemy could be concealed, they soon turned the timber; but that which had drawn their scrutiny was no longer in sight; it had vanished in the wood, sank into the earth, or was hidden in the grass.

"We were seen, you perceive," said Brion. "Our design was fathomed before we changed our course. But what is this upon this tree? A human figure carved in the bark!"

The mountaineers rode to the tree, and examined the carving, which was yet fresh.

"Not ten minutes have elapsed since the edge of the knife left these lines," said Brion.

"Not five," said Buckeye. "The sap yet flows from the wounds. Now this wasn't made for nothin'; there's meanin' to it, as there is about everythin' an Ingin does."

"Possibly it was cut merely for amusement," replied the partisan.

"No, sir; depend on't there's some deviltry in it."

"The handiwork of Redpath," answered Brion, with a smile and an incredulous look.

"It wouldn't be strange, though I don't think the cretur finds time for much fancy-work of this particular description."

"It strikes me, Buckeye, that you really fear this incomprehensible Redpath."

"Fear is a word I don't very much like, cap'n, even from you. I'll thank you to find the man who'll call me a coward to my face. As for Redpath, he's like nobody else—a sort of Ingin devil, that baffles the wisest of us; but I'm not afraid of him—no, not by no means; and in fact I should like to meet him face to face, as one brave man meets another. I would put a good American rifle-ball through his body; I would kill him as I would a wolf, and his accursed art and mystery would perish with him."

The mountaineers were bending over their horses' necks, looking at the figure; the air was slightly disturbed, and something passed between them and struck the object at which they were looking with a sharp concussion. Both instinctively drew back—a long arrow was quivering in the tree. For a moment, Brion was too much astonished to speak or to act.

"By the beard of Smith!" said Buckeye.

The sound of his voice aroused the partisan; putting spurs to his horse, he dashed toward the timber.

"By heavens!" he muttered. "I will make an attempt to solve this mystery."

He urged his horse into the wood, which, being free from underbush, offered but little impediment; he galloped through and around it, and came back with his animal heated and foaming.

"Why do you sit motionless? Why not make an effort to find this invisible archer?" asked the trapper.

"A sense of gratitude fastens me here, cap'n."

"A sense of gratitude? I do not understand."

"It is jes' here; consider, and you'll perceive that the arm that sent that shaft directly to the head of that figure, could as easily have sent it through your head or mine."

"That is a very just conclusion, Buckeye. I did not pause to think of nice points; but indeed I could scarcely find it in my heart to draw a hair-sight on one, who, having my life in his power, did not take it. In this you have acted wisely. Yes, the eye that aimed that arrow could have aimed it at a human brain instead of an insentient one like that. What a narrow boundary lies between us and death!"

"Scarcely wider than the edge of my hunt-in-knife."

"Ah, Buckeye, we must travel that trail sometime!"

"A strange road—a strange road! And it's been used a good deal, too."

"Death is, at times, a cold and awful mystery to me; but not always. What is it to you?"

"I expect my mind is a dark and ignorant one, but it too often seems to me an eternal sleep. Perchance, I shall go back to elemental dust, and be as I was a thousand years ago—a little matter in motion, only changin' form."

"That is not the most cheerful belief imaginable, but far better than a future of pain."

While Brion was thus conversing, his hands were not idle; he was cutting the arrow from the tree with his hatchet—which, when extracted, he examined with a feeling of intense curiosity. The sharp, polished, tapering steel head, delicately small, the long, smooth shaft attached, had for him a peculiar interest—connected, as they were, with the fate of Townsend and Minten, Stringer and Grenier.

"It is wondrously well wrought," he remarked.

"And marvellously well-spiced, too," added Buckeye.

"I will keep it as a memento of Redpath."

"Also to make you think, perhaps, that the mate to it is kept for you, and you will some time receive it."

The canon was now near at hand, and as they drew in sight of it, the partisan saw a human form standing upon the summit of a high cliff, which he quickly pointed out to the trapper. The sun was shining upon the jagged elevation gloriously, making the figure appear as if clothed in garments of flame. He gazed down upon the horsemen a moment, waved his hand, and disappeared.

Brion looked inquiringly at his companion.

"It may be the Evil One himself; he shone like a pillar of fire!" suggested Buckeye.

"His majesty has a majestic figure, then?"

"He can assume any shape, undoubtedly."

The mountaineers entered the canon, and passed through it; it sheltered no visible enemy and they turned their horses' heads toward

the encampment of the previous night, Brion entirely absorbed in thought.

"Do you know," said Buckeye, interrupting his reverie, "that Redpath is not the only one among us that is dangerous? There is one who aims not at the head, but at the heart, and her arrows go straight as a rifle-ball."

Brion writhed under the trapper's railery, but deemed it wisest to keep silent.

"And yet this fair archer, though she doesn't aim at the head, affects the brain not a little with her pretty arrows, which are launched from her sparklin' eyes."

The mountaineer confessed, internally, that there was truth in this metaphor, inasmuch as the insidiously wounding weapons of Mignon were vibrating beneath his hunting frock, at the very centre of a great and active misdeed, which is indispensable to life.

CHAPTER X.

A SACRIFICE TO THE CORN-SPIRIT.

Mignon and the black intended to follow the directions of Brion to the letter; but notwithstanding his instructions to keep to the right, Balaam unwittingly took the left side of the hill. They had made half the circuit of the hill before the consequences of their inattention were apparent. A yell recalled Balaam to the outer waking world—rudely, it must be confessed, but effectually. Mignon was the first to realize the misfortune that had befallen them. She perceived around her a circle of dusky men, armed with spears, knives, and guns; she had fallen into an ambush of Indians. The discovery was one to try the firmest nerves. Balaam, seeing a red hand grasp his horse's bridle, thought it time to bestir himself; with a sweep of his long arm he felled the offender, then disengaging a small axe which was secured at his saddle, and in the use of which he was practiced, he struck down another savage, and prepared for a sturdy defence of his mistress. Enraged at his resistance, they swarmed upon him in overwhelming numbers, with loud, vindictive whoops.

For a time the giant strength of the black prevailed, his weapon gleaming around him in rapid circles, scattering his foes; but anon a hatchet hurled by a warrior took effect upon his head. The faithful negro cast a despairing look at Mignon, and lost his seat in the saddle; but when upon the ground, he sprang up and shook himself like a lion; then even Mignon believed he might prove unconquerable. He struck a few blows, then sank upon one knee, yet continuing to resist and defy them in his own peculiar way. Perceiving that his strength was failing, he turned his eyes toward his beloved mistress.

"The red niggers hab fixed me—God bress ye, missy!" he said, and fell forward upon his face. The infuriated savages would have mangled and mutilated his body—but their chief commanded them to desist, adding—that cowards might be hacked and cut in pieces, but not brave men who sell their lives dearly. This humane Indian, however, did not waive the established usage of his race, and in a moment held up poor Balaam's scalp. At the sight of this reeking trophy, Mignon swooned. When she recovered, she was seated at the foot of a tree, her body supported by the trunk. The natives were grouped together a few paces distant, speaking earnestly in their own dialect which sounded harsh and horrible to Mignon. There seemed to be a division of opinion among them, which was finally settled, as she judged, by the altered tones of their voices. The chief came and looked at her attentively.

"You wear," he said, in English so broken that we shall not attempt to give it verbatim, "the garb of a princess of the Blackfoot nation, but your skin is pale. The Blackfoot and the Crow are enemies; they hate each other—they go to war and take scalps—they put their prisoners to death. Pale faced woman, you must die!"

"Do the warriors of the Crow nation wage war against women?" asked Mignon, striving to rally her courage.

"They destroy their enemies," returned the chief.

"Enemies are those who take the war-path; the women of the pale-face nation never go upon the war-path; they love peace and remain at home."

"Then why art thou here?" said the chief, quickly.

"Not to take life, but to save it," Mignon answered.

"Like all your craven race, you shrink from death."

"And why should I not? Am I not young, and does not the young heart cling to existence? Women die well when the Great Spirit calls; but they draw back from violence and blood."

"The Great Spirit calls you now."

"I cannot hear him."

"He calls you through my voice; he bids you get ready."

"The Crows are cowards, or they would not kill women; brave men hold such deeds in horror," rejoined Mignon.

"Pale maiden, it is better to die young than old. If you go to the land of souls now, you will remain young and beautiful forever; but if you live till you are old and wrinkled, you will enter that country as such, and continue so."

"Hear me: I have a father who has much gold; he has a trading-house beyond yonder mountains, where he keeps the things most valued by red men; go there with me, and you shall be made rich above all your tribe."

The Indian paused a moment, as if meditating upon what he had heard, and Mignon began to hope.

"You shall have guns that never miss their aim, ammunition to last your life-time, blankets that defy the snows of the coldest winter, and horses that are swifter than the antelope, and stronger than the buffalo. With these you can make war upon the Blackfeet, and conquer them."

"Pale-faces have artful tongues, and the red man cannot tell when they speak the truth. What you say sounds well, but you might lead us into the strong forts of the whites, where we should be slain by the thunder of the great guns. I have listened to you too long. The corn-spirit requires an offering, and he will not be content save with a young and beautiful maiden, such as thou art."

"Will the manner of my death be painful?" Mignon asked.

"White maiden, it will be painful, but not of long duration," said the Crow. "In the land of souls you will forget your sufferings, and rejoice to see the corn growing green and tall to feed our hungry children."

"It is horrible!" exclaimed Mignon.

"It is naught compared to the torture of three days, when twelve fires are lighted, and all the art of inflicting pain are exhausted," he replied, his face glowing with savage ferocity at the recollection of the scenes he had witnessed.

With these words he left her and issued orders which she could not understand. Presently she was placed upon her horse, and the party set off toward the mountains. Mignon turned a last lingering look toward the hill where she had expected to find friends and safety.

She submitted to her captors with the helpless passiveness of despair, her bowed head and drooping form testifying to her deep despondency.

The Indians did not address her, and the trail to the nearest Crow village was traced silently. Tallbear, the chief, kept near her person, setting an example of taciturnity which was followed by his warriors.

They pressed forward without stopping, though their progress was slow. The gloomiest night that Mignon ever experienced approached, and with it came clouds and a shower of rain, attended with thunder and lightning. Tallbear ordered a halt, watching the heavens with anxious expression.

"The Great Spirit is angry," said Mignon, hoping to turn the elemental strife to her advantage.

"Yes," answered the chief, "he is angry because the sacrifice is delayed."

"Not so; but for the reason that such a fearful rite is contemplated. While rebuking your wickedness with the thunder and lightning, he at the same time gives you rain to refresh your corn, and prove to you that he can make it grow without your aid."

At that instant there was a terrific explosion, and the red, quivering lightning played around them. The ground trembled with the violence of the concussion. A large tree was shivered from its topmost branches to the roots, while an Indian who had been standing beneath it was stricken lifeless. Tallbear was awed. Ig-

norant of Nature and her laws, thunder and lightning to him had supernatural origin, and indicated the displeasure of the Master of Life.

"Behold," cried Mignon, "the avenging arm of God! He has turned his hand against you; he has smitten one of your braves. He is just, he does well; to him I commend my soul. Red man, hear his awful voice and tremble! His mighty car is rolling through the skies, and the heavens quake. He is over our heads—he is seeing us—his fires are burning in the air with dreadful vehemence."

While Mignon was speaking, lambent flames darting from above played around her pale cheeks. Tallbear recoiled, contemplating her with pallid visage and parted lips.

"Pale-face woman, thou art a great medicine!" he exclaimed.

"I am," she resumed, with more impressive emphasis, "but a perishable creature like thee, but I have skill in interpreting the will of the Great Spirit. I know what he desires of his children; and there is that within that tells me when his power will go forth in fearful fury to rebuke blood-thirsty warriors, and lay low arrogant chieftains. Tallbear, listen! the Master of Life threatens! Hear his stern menace in the affrighted heavens!"

The maiden paused, and peal on peal shook the mountains, while electrical flashes blazed blindingly around their summits, streaming down into the valley below in red-hot chains.

"It is thus," continued Mignon, with solemnity, "that the God of the white man and the red manifests his indignation and his might!"

The braves threw themselves prostrate upon the earth, covering their eyes with their hands. Tallbear only remained standing, he bowed his head upon his breast submissively.

"White woman, if the Master of Life is angry, what shall Tallbear do to turn aside his displeasure?" he asked.

"I will ask him," said Mignon, closing her eyes and crossing her arms upon her breast; she remained silent a few moments, then addressing the chief:

"The answer is (looking steadily at Tallbear), offer no more bloody sacrifices to the corn-spirit, for there is but one God that presides over all things, and he is the Master of Life."

"Inquire yet again, and ask him what I shall do with the pale-face woman?"

Mignon perceived that all depended on the skilfulness of her reply; she had reached the most delicate and critical point of her purpose. She closed her eyes, and crossed her arms again, to gain time to form a fitting answer.

"Find a woman among your people who has lost a daughter, and let her adopt the child of the pale-face," she said.

This reply was judicious, for the suspicions of Tallbear might have been aroused, had she demanded her liberty at once.

"I will send for our medicine-men, and they shall fast three days and see if the Great Spirit will confirm this," returned the Indian.

"The Master of Life speaks but once to man; he never repeats!" exclaimed Mignon, with a dignity and earnestness wondrous to Tallbear.

"That is well; he never repeats," he said; then looking searchingly at his captive, added:

"And he never denies!"

"And he never denies," repeated Mignon, in the same tone. "But it becomes the awful Deity to remain silent when he has once declared his sovereign will to man."

"Speak again to the Great Spirit and ask if the prisoner will attempt to escape?"

Mignon saw at once the subtlety of this proposition.

"I have done," she said; "his presence is departing—his chariot-wheels are rolling over the mountains. Be content and humble. Speak to me no more—I am dumb." Mignon turned her back to Tallbear, and assumed her former silent and hopeless attitude. Tallbear walked away, and seated himself apart from his braves, apparently in a thoughtful mood.

In half an hour the storm passed; the rain ceased falling, the thunder was heard faintly rumbling at a great distance, while the lightning blazed against the far-off sky with diminished brightness.

The party went on again, and in two hours drew in sight of a Crow village, in view of which they halted—it being their custom when they had lost warriors not to enter their village on their return, without an invitation from the friends of the slain. The dogs gave notice of their approach, and in a short time the sleepy natives were astir, making suitable preparations to receive their warriors, who, after considerable delay, were formally invited to enter

the town. Mignon, though an object of much curiosity, was treated with respect. The tent which the unfortunate Balaam had succeeded in securing when his mistress left Callard's encampment, was taken from the horse, upon which it had been carefully packed, and set up for her exclusive use by Tallbear, who clearly intended to treat her with distinction until her fate should be decided by the "medicine-men."

The latter were called together early in the morning. The chief made them acquainted with his original intention of sacrificing Mignon to placate the corn-spirit, with what subsequently occurred during the storm of thunder, and his own determination to refer the matter to those skilled in the ways of the invisible powers.

"Now go," he added, "and have lodges built in some lonely spot, and fast according to your custom, and thus learn the will of the Manito of your people."

Whether it was that the "medicine-men" had no relish for fasting three days, or whether they believed they had been already instructed, we are not able to avow; but they declared that the Master of Life had enlightened their minds in dreams and visions; and after a little time, if left undisturbed, they would make known his wishes. The three medicine-men accordingly withdrew to a lodge, which every person was forbidden to approach. Presently, Mignon heard the sound of an Indian drum, and frantic yells proceeding from the lodge, and shuddered to think such wretches were to decide her fate. They continued their orgies some hours—a period of dreadful anxiety to Mignon, who, solitary in her tent, was awaiting the conclusion of the rites.

Mignon's father was a Catholic; but she had been educated in the Protestant religion, in harmony with the views of her deceased mother; and she now sought the consolations of the Christian faith. She petitioned God with that contrite fervor that her condition was so well calculated to awaken, seeking that calm strength, that unshrinking fortitude, He only can impart.

"Daughter of the pale face, come!" said a voice.

It was Tallbear who spoke; he had come to conduct her to hear the verdict of the medicine men. She found the Indians assembled on a plateau near the village, in close neighborhood to a large field of corn. She followed with modest and melancholy mien, her beauty and grace attracting much attention and remark. The medicine men were in a circle, formed by the principal men of the village; next the latter, were the braves; while the third and last ring was composed of women and children—a motley, clamorous rabble.

When Mignon reached the central circle, where the three prophets were awaiting her, Tallbear addressed them:

"What," he asked, "says the Manito of the Crow Nation?"

"That the love of life is strong, and all wish to live to enjoy summer and sunshine."

Mignon heard the rejoinder, and though she had made up her mind for the worst, hope revived a little. "Summer and sunshine!" These words had a meaning they never before possessed. She could not refrain from raising her eyes toward the glorious luminary—the eternal lamp of Nature. The refulgent beams gleamed as brightly upon her as in the days of her childhood, before she understood the meaning of the word "death." A gentle breeze from the West blew on her face and toyed with her hair.

"O God!" she exclaimed, "why can I not enjoy this forever? Why hast thou placed the grave before mortals, and called them to a baptism of pain?"

"Go on," said Tallbear.

"And he added, moreover," resumed the spokesman of the medicine-men, "that he speaketh in thunder and fire; that he createth all things, and causeth the Indian corn to grow."

"I am saved!" thought Mignon. "God will spare my youth!"

The prophet went on:

"But lest he might sometime forget the corn, he has given it in charge of a powerful spirit, whose duty it is to watch over it night and day. The pale-face woman has said that the Master of Life loveth not blood, but it was the God of the white man that told her so."

"There is but one God!" said Mignon, who saw her last hope passing away.

"The red man does not serve the God of the

pale-faces," returned the prophet. "Every nation has its deity, and no two are alike. We follow the voice of the Great Spirit, and no other will we hear. Behold what he has given us! Look at the boundless hunting-grounds, the mighty plains, the shaded valleys, the green forests which he has kindly bestowed upon us. White woman, the Indian did not make himself; but one greater than he made him, with all his instincts. Can his nature change? Can he be other than he is? Who faults him will offend the great and eternal Master of Life. See me—regard me—study me! I am what I am, not because I had any voice in it, but because a will stronger than mine existing before I had consciousness, willed it so. My face is red—my nature is not soft and weak like yours; it does not love cities and the arts of your people—it has joy in the hunt, and on the war-path. And why? Because it is so decreed. I am an Indian, and I thank the Great Spirit that I am! Thus, you see, the Power that created me reconciles me to be what I am; therefore, He is wise. It is so with you. You will act true to your nature, and I shall to mine. The manners and customs of nations differ. Our ways seem barbarous to you, and yours are contemptible to us. Pale girl, the corn-spirit is thirsty, we will give him drink."

"Last night, the Great Spirit sent rain," said Mignon.

"He drinks not water," said the prophet.

"Oh, it is vain to struggle against fate!" exclaimed Mignon.

"Vain indeed!" added the Indian, in a deep, sepulchral voice. "Could those towering mountains have resisted the will that placed them there for a barrier between us and the sea? Could the snow have helped falling upon their summits? Could you have struggled against his hand when he took up the dust to form you? Know, O fair daughter of a hated race, that all things are ordered, and not anything can change. It being destined that you shall die, how can mortal power make you live? Cease to struggle, and meet calmly a fate that you cannot resist; this is the lesson taught by everything in Nature. Because you are a woman, and your flesh is tender and shrinks from pain, the Master of Life sends you an easy death."

The prophet made a sign to Tallbear, who approached with a small cord, composed of the inner bark of a tree.

For an instant, Mignon experienced a fearful shrinking, and a sickening agony of spirit; but conquering measurably her weakness, she looked at the chief, and demanded, in a voice quite free from agitation:

"What is the manner of my death?"

"It is quick and easy; an arrow will pierce your bosom, and you will be in the spirit-land of your fathers before one of yonder clouds can pass over the sun's face," he replied.

"It is well—I am ready; but do not mutilate my person. Bury my body on one of yonder high cliffs, where the same sun that shines upon the wigwam of my father may shine on my ashes!" said Mignon, submissively.

Tallbear came near to bind her hands.

"Take away the cord; since there is to be no torture, no protracted agony, to bind me were useless. Tell me where to stand, and I will present my breast to your marksman."

"Pale girl, you have courage," said Tallbear, in a low tone. "I would save you if I could, for your voice has a wondrous melody in it, and your beauty is like that of the spirit-maidens in the far land of souls. Maiden, the arrow that enters your bosom will give pain to the heart of Tallbear. But the Great Spirit is wise. It is better that you should be taken from my sight."

Then, in a louder voice:

"Daughter of the Longknives, we will not send you unprovided to the land of Shadows, your horses shall go with, and your beautiful lodge, that you may have a horse to ride, and a lodge to dwell in."

Tallbear waved his hand, and the circling ride of warriors, women, and children opened before him.

"Look!" said he, pointing through the narrow lane thus made, "yonder are your horses, and your lodge has been taken down and packed upon them. When you reach the country of spirits, you will not have long to wait for your horses; you will find everything as it was in this world, and the black man with the strong arms will be there to attend you; he is waiting you now; when he sees

your large horse, he will hasten to prepare him for your use, and he will hang your little rifle at the saddle, if you should want to hunt the deer."

Mignon saw the animals at a short distance, prepared as for a journey. The one she usually rode, seeing his mistress, erected his ears and neighed—a proof of affection which called tears to her eyes. With a parting glance at the noble creature that had borne her uncomplainingly so many miles, she submitted herself to the commands of Tallbear.

"Place me quickly, and let it be soon over," she said.

The chief led her to the centre of the circle.

"This is the spot. Here is a bandage to cover your eyes. Your heart is not big enough to see the bow bent and the arrow pointed; you will shrink and run away, or swoon with terror."

"I will do neither; since it is my duty to die, I will die as becomes the daughter of the great pale-face nation."

There was a general murmur of approbation.

"It is good," said Tallbear.

Then, in a whisper

"Never had the corn-spirit a more beautiful offering. Your eyes are like those of the deer when the hunter's knife is at its throat, hanging over its small neck. Pale girl, you have power over Tallbear!"

The Indian gazed a moment at Mignon with a softened expression—his strong hand trembled while placing her in the attitude deemed fitting—and more than once he hesitated and looked at the horses; some half-formed purpose appeared to agitate him.

"Maiden, be firm—the way to the land of souls is toward the West, and your swift horses will fly like birds along the path."

With a heavy breath, much like a sigh of regret, the chief left Mignon, who stood with her face toward the open space in the circle. The ribbon or scarf of high-colored stuff which covered the upper portion of her person, was suffered to fall a little upon the left side, while over the breast she placed the gift of Ravenclaw—a raven wrought in beads.

"Let your bowman aim at this; my heart is beneath it," she said, with a calmness that surprised the grim warriors, and raised another hum of admiration.

A sinewy Indian walked through the living avenue, and appeared at the margin of the second circle. He carried a long-bow in his right hand, which, when held vertically beside him, with one end resting upon the ground, reached higher than his head. His quiver slung over his bare and brawny shoulder contained but a single arrow, pointed with bone. He came with a lithe and dignified step, and stopping at the proper spot, stood erect before Mignon a few yards distant. She heard his coming, and there was a quickened motion of the snowy globe which was to be his mark. He glanced inquiringly at Tallbear, the latter saw him not; with folded arms, compressed lips, and heaving chest, he was looking at Mignon. The red archer remained motionless; suddenly Tallbear turned toward him; his face was flushed, there were beads of perspiration on his forehead; he made a hasty gesture to the Indian who was waiting his orders; he took the arrow from the quiver, and fitted it to the string. Mignon stirred not, trembled not, though conscious of the movement. The archer paused with the shaft leveled at the figure of the raven upon Mignon's breast; he waited another signal when he would bend the tough fibres of the sturdy wood, and launch the arrow like lightning at the fairest mark man ever aimed at. Tallbear was in the act of giving that signal, and the Indian was about to let fly his fatal shaft when a bright object gleamed momentarily in the air, and he fell forward upon his face. Immediately, before a warrior had moved, a grim and terrible figure bounded into the circle; his skull was bare to the bone, his face black and streaked with blood; a savage fury and determination marked his motions. He caught Mignon in his arms, and with such a look as the lion casts upon those who kill her young, bore her from the ring. No one spoke, not a hand grasped a knife, gun, or tomahawk—all tongues were mute, every warrior paralyzed. Mignon was lifted to the back of her favorite horse; the reins were given her—she grasped them—she felt herself in rapid flight, and one who seemed to her bewildered fancy like Balaam, was at her side.

CHAPTER XI.

NEW ADVENTURES IN THE CANON.

Balaam, it will be remembered, was stunned by a hatchet, hurled effectively at his head by a warrior; losing his seat, he finally sank exhausted beneath repeated wounds. He remained insensible a long time. The first premonition of returning life was a consciousness of pain. He became sensible, at last, of some kind of an existence, without the ability to connect the past with the present, or to know where the thread of outer life had been broken. His head glowing with a fiery heat, his eyes drowned in an abyss of darkness, his stiffened tongue, his throat hot and dry, a dull, weary motion of the heart, made him conscious of misery only, without awakening individual identity.

But Balaam's vital powers were strong, and able to resist much suffering; they prevailed, at length, over wounds and bruises restored sight to his swimming vision, and activity to his brain. He raised his head from the ground; the red beams of the sun, then at its meridian, glowing into his face, extinguished, for an instant, his newly-restored sight.

Presently he arose to his feet, he saw one of Mignon's gloves lying near him, and it quickened at once the sluggish current of memory. The thought of Mignon in danger absorbed him wholly, to the utter exclusion of himself, his wounds, and his wretched condition. He quenched his burning thirst at the nearest stream, and then took the trail of the savages, with the eagerness of a hound that scents his prey. His iron frame disdained its wounds, and his resolute soul, with the undying faithfulness of the dog, scorned physical pain and the gnawings of hunger. Fortunately for him, most of his hurts were not of a very dangerous character, the blow upon his head, with the loss of his scalp, being the most serious; though his arms and body were much hacked and scarred by knives and other weapons.

Defying all obstacles, Balaam tracked the red robbers who had wrested away his precious charge, determined to save her or share her fate. In what manner he was to deliver her, he did not know, or even ask himself—so entirely were his still disordered faculties occupied in the idea of pursuit. He reached the Indian town at the moment when Mignon's fate seemed decided. He was going to throw himself upon the Indian with the bow, and crush him with his giant strength, when a gleaming shaft passed him like lightning, and the tawny archer fell, stricken through the brain with a steel-headed arrow. We have related what then occurred. The Indians, after the rescue of Mignon, took up the dead body of the warrior, and retired in silence to their village. It was to them evident that the Great Spirit was not pleased with what they had proposed.

Mignon and Balaam had not proceeded far, before they discovered a party of men advancing, that proved to be Captain Brion, Buckeye, and a select number of hardy mountaineers. This sudden meeting, together with the singular plight of the black, excited both inquiry and surprise; and the latter gave place to gratitude, when the startling experiences of Mignon and the negro had been properly set forth. No one, however, not excepting Balaam, was more thankful than the partisan, for the wonderful escape of Mignon. The revulsion of feeling was so great with her, when she fully realized that she was snatched from death, and was safe with friends, that she lost her consciousness. Brion being the first to observe that she was fainting, caught her in his arms, thus timely preventing a fall from her horse. Balaam, too, now that the excitement was over, felt the need of attention, and the poor fellow was immediately attended to—his wounds dressed, his bravery praised, his fidelity lauded. The purifying and cooling effects of water, and the comforting nature of brandy, were speedily tested, in his case, with the most happy effects. Hearty food was not allowed him, but he was permitted to swallow a portion of a biscuit with his arguante, when his vivacity being measurably restored, he was able to utter several pleasantries at the expense of his scalptless cranium. The necessary sanitary operations having been attended to, the mountaineers resumed their way toward the canon, in which the band had encamped the previous day. The partisan placed himself near Mignon, occasionally asking questions concerning her capture, referring to his own anxiety, and detailing the efforts he had made to find her. The account of her rescue was to

him intensely interesting. There was something perfectly incomprehensible in that transaction. The idea of the mysterious Redpath was again evoked; how could it be otherwise? Had not the evidence of his presence been indubitable? Unquestionably, yes. There had been a death from an arrow in a manner that he had himself witnessed.

"Mademoiselle Bellmar," he said, "it would appear that you owe your escape to the interposition of that ever-present creature, Redpath?"

"My mind has been in such a world of excitement and confusion since my unexpected escape, that I have not yet reflected calmly; but that I am indebted to Redpath, seems an inevitable conclusion—a conviction that forces itself upon me spontaneously, without the trouble of reasoning," she replied.

"It would interest me to know what your ideas may be concerning this singular personage, who has a marvellous power of ubiquity, certainly," Brion added.

Mignon paused to rally her thoughts.

"Hitherto," she answered, "my conceptions of him have been quite untinged with romance, and practical to the last degree. I pictured him, brave Brion, a wily savage, gifted with a power of cunning remarkable, even for his race, and actuated by the strongest feelings of vindictiveness. Fired with undying enmity, strengthened with unnatural hate, endowed with dauntless courage, and aided by that fox-like cunning, he has been able to cover his movements with mystery, and make his name a word of terror."

"Those were your former views; now your present opinion, if you please?"

"My thoughts, at this moment, are so unlike what they were, that I shall doubtless excite a smile upon your lips, Captain Brion. Redpath is more like the eagle than the raven!"

Brion's eyes rested upon the figure of the raven upon Mignon's breast, at that moment, and he said, with a smile:

"But you give the preference to the raven, it would seem?"

Mignon's cheeks assumed a deeper red.

"Yes, I wear the raven, but I shall attempt to impose on my imagination, and think it an eagle," she replied. "Redpath, as I said, is more like the eagle than the raven. He has eyes that are bold and piercing, that dare the sun to dazzle them. He has a front like the god of war. His features are noble, his manners lofty and proud. Redpath is tall and stately as the cedars of Lebanon. With other men, he is like Saul among the prophets. His tread is firm and fearless. He speaks but little, and his words are commands. He reads the destiny of the red man; he sees the coming supremacy of the white, and the destiny of the Indian. He knows that the way of his people is over the mountains, and toward the sea—and toward oblivion. The thought of the extinction of a great nation like his, through the injustice of the pale-faces, maddens him; his noble soul swells with emotions inexpressible, and he invokes the vengeance of the great and awful Master of Life."

While Mignon was thus describing Redpath, she stopped near a swamp of musquite, and Brion dismounted to adjust her saddle-girth.

"Did you not hear a sound?" he asked, turning toward the musquite.

Mignon was already looking in that direction. She replied, with some embarrassment:

"A slight disturbance among the leaves, occasioned, I imagine, by yonder prairie-dog, which our voices frightened from his shelter."

But Mignon, in this instance, was not quite ingenuous; she had seen, while Brion was employed with the girth, and at the instant she was finishing her description, the tall form of Ravenclaw. He stood in the musquite in an attentive attitude, as if listening to the tones of her voice. He cast upon her a look of mingled melancholy and pride, and she saw him no more.

"Ah!" quoth Brion, rather drily, "you make a hero of Redpath."

"But what can you expect, my friend, from a giddy girl, who owes her life to this same personage?"

"Oh!" thought the partisan, "it should have been I who saved this charming woman!"

"You have painted him with the colors of the novelist; but I will not cavil, inasmuch as he deserves unmeasured commendation for what he has done. Redpath, in this, has done me a good service, also," Brion answered.

"In what manner has he been of service to you, Captain Brion?"

"Had you suffered the fate intended for you, I should never cease to reproach myself," said the mountaineer.

"And why?"

"For the simple reason, that I did not care for you better after you put yourself under my protection; it was in me, criminal neglect, for which I most earnestly ask your pardon."

"I cannot absolve you from a sin which you never incurred. Please to remember that I positively refused your escort to the camp; therefore, if blame there be, it necessarily falls on me."

"I see well where my error was, and even your ingenuous kindness cannot make me forget it. From this hour it shall be my special prerogative to attend to your safety; it shall be the first, the greatest, the last of my duties, so long as you shall think proper to honor me with your presence and confidence."

"Thanks—thanks! You will well discharge the self-imposed duty; but let me entreat you not to neglect more important matters for the sake of a truant maiden, whose erratic wanderings expose her to the charge of female quixotism."

"Chastisement to him who has the presumption to make that or any other charge of a reproachful character!" exclaimed Brion, with a menacing motion of the hand. "He who couples your name with aught that is unbecoming, shall feel the anger of Ben Brion!"

"And that," said Buckeye, who now joined the parties, "is no slight thing, according to my views of human nature."

"I trust my humble name will not give rise to aught unpleasant," said Mignon, with heightened color.

"Your name, miss," quoth Buckeye, "shall be the watchword of the camp. By the beard of Joe Smith! them as hasn't no partic'lar religion 'mong us, shall pray to you!"

"I fear I shall prove a poor, dumb divinity," returned Mignon, laughing.

"I sh'n't put up my petitions to nobody else!" rejoined Buckeye. "When I feel like worshippin', I want somethin' I can see."

"You are a materialist," said Brion.

"I should be a good Christian, I reckon, if I allers had somethin' lovely in the woman-like 'bout me; it softens the rough side of my nature—the nor'-west mountainous side, which has allers been uncultivated and neglected."

"Will you be good enough, Buckeye, to repeat me one of the prayers you intend to make use of?" requested the mountaineer.

"Well, cap'n, it would be uncommon like the one I heard you sayin' in your sleep, not long ago."

"You are talking at random!" protested Brion, palpably disconcerted.

"There's two things I never do—I mean talk at random or shoot at random. But as to the prayer, it should commence somewhat in this fashion: 'O Mignon, a rude old sinner entreates you never to leave him, that there may be somethin' lovely and good allers near to apologize for the rest of human nature.'"

"Not so bad," said Brion.

"Come, sir, desist!" interposed the divinity of this prayer. Then to Buckeye: "I trust that you mean me well, and intend no disrespect."

"If I mean you any otherwise than well, may I be scalped!" cried Buckeye, bluntly.

"I can vouch for his goodness of heart, Miss Bellmar. He has given himself not a moment's rest since your disappearance, and looked for the trail of your captors as earnestly as if you had been his own child."

"There's a heap of malice in ye, cap'n! I ain't old enough to be the girl's father, no ways, and the innoocendo isn't altogether friendly," replied the trapper, gravely.

"Oh, I am sure you are not old," added Mignon.

"Sartinly not. Here's Flash; I'll leave it to Flash; and Flash has known me long 'n any of ye. Come, Flash, what do you say?"

"It's well for you he can't speak," said the partisan, good-humoredly. "A strange tale he'd be telling!"

"Do you hear him, miss? He's afeard I shall become a favorite with you, as I shall, if I live long enough."

"I have you in much favor, now," replied Miss Bellmar, playfully.

In pleasant conversation the parties beguiled the tedium of the returning trail. By the middle of the afternoon, they were within a few miles of the canon.

Life seemed more precious to Mignon than at any previous period of her existence. The sun, the skies, the earth, presented new attractions and beauties hitherto unappreciated. She marveled that she had ever beheld them with feelings of indifference.

"Glorious world!" she mentally exclaimed, "I shall not yet leave thee. I shall dwell with and in thee, and experience for many years, perchance, the munificence of provident Nature."

Hearing words of salutation from Buckeye, she looked up, and perceived that two persons, on horseback, had joined the party.

"Ah!" said Brion, who kept his place at her side, "here is an addition to our numbers."

"And you will do well to be on your guard. One of those approaching is the special instrument of Mariot—a half-breed, whose name is Gardette, generally known, I believe, by his Indian name of Beavertaker; while the other is no less a personage than Captain Callard, the partisan of a band of trappers," said Mignon.

"I know them, mademoiselle. That Providence which reaches to the wilderness, and beyond those mighty mountains even, has made me acquainted with those now advancing," returned the mountaineer.

"Whatever may be the nature and design of their visit, I trust you will remember, captain, that I am under your protection," Mignon added, with considerable agitation of manner.

"I certainly will not forget a circumstance affording me so much pleasure."

"I need not admonish you to be firm."

"In your cause such admonition is unnecessary. But here they are."

"Captain Brion, I believe?" said Callard, addressing the mountaineer.

"I am thus called," said the latter.

"I think we met many years ago," resumed the former; "but this precarious life of ours changes the human face, you know?"

"The extremes of heat and cold, hunger and thirst and hardship, all set their mark upon the features," Brion answered.

During the time this rejoinder occupied, Callard was looking furtively at Mignon.

"But," added Brion, "though exposure and suffering may roughen the features, I trust it will never change the heart of an honest trapper."

"No, assuredly; at least I hope not, in your case," returned Callard.

"I believe I have a clear conscience. I have tried to make it my study to act the man of honor. Now, will you be kind enough to inform me to what lucky chance I owe the honor of this visit?"

Disconcerted by the suddenness of this request, Callard exhibited much embarrassment.

"What I have to say, Captain Brion, is, probably, more proper for your private ear," he rejoined.

"If there is aught in your message to make a lady blush, I do not wish to hear it. The young woman that you see near me may safely be made the repository of the most important secret that can be intrusted to human keeping."

"But if the subject to be discussed concerns this young lady herself, you perceive that it may alter the case."

"Not at all! Speak what you have been commissioned to at once, and in her hearing if it concerns her, why, then, she is the party most interested, and has a right to be present!"

"I will throw aside disguise at once," said Callard. "This lady is Mademoiselle Bellmar, who left the roof of her aged father in the garb of a youthful adventurer, and joined company with me at Fort Leavenworth. The fact of her sex having transpired, she clandestinely left my encampment."

"Had she not a right to do so?"

"Under ordinary circumstances she had an undoubted right to govern her own movements; but this, you will readily apprehend, was a peculiar case. It was my duty, as well as my design, to send her back to her father under a safe escort. It was an unwillingness to return, that unquestionably induced her to withdraw from my protection."

"You cannot imagine that Miss Bellmar has not a will or purpose of her own?"

"Certainly; she has too much will, and as to her purpose, I will not wound her delicacy by referring to it."

"Nor need you; I know it already."

"That she entered on this wild enterprise to

be near her lover, may be admitted, without compromising her womanly instincts; but there is no accounting for that caprice that induced her to fly from him, when, to all human appearance, it was quite unneeded."

"With delicate questions of this nature, it ill becomes you and I to meddle. She will herself regulate her speech and conduct in regard to such matters."

"Allow the chivalrous captain to proceed; he has learned well his lesson," said Mignon, with disdainful calmness.

"I insist that there was nothing unmaidenly in her conduct, when it is considered that she has from her infancy been engaged to Monsieur Mariot, and her marriage was arranged to take place immediately after his return from his present expedition."

"You are not only ingenious but ingenuous!" exclaimed Mignon, while the blood mounted indignantly to her cheeks. "What you intimate is base and false. Pierre Mariot is the most contemptible of men!"

"He is your father's partner, mademoiselle!"

"To his regret and mine."

"I will not cavil, but come to the point. My present purpose is to conduct the daughter of my employer back to my camp."

"She will act her pleasure," added Brion.

"I shall remain where I am. And I commission you to assure Pierre Mariot of my unmeasured scorn," said Mignon.

"In case of your refusal, I am charged to act against your wishes—for your own good."

"That means to capture my person, and take me to Pierre Mariot by brute strength?"

"It implies some degree of force, of course, Miss Bellmar—which rudeness I hope you will attribute solely to zeal for your happiness. This sudden aversion, believe me, will soon give place to your former feelings. Do me the honor to accompany me?"

"Captain Brion," said Mignon, "I have no more to say to this man. To you I commit the guardianship of my person."

"The captain has too much sense, young lady, to meddle with an affair that does not concern him, but rather tends to disconcert his plans for the commencing campaign," Callard answered, with increasing confidence.

"Ah, we shall see," quoth Brion.

"Beavertaker, this way!" said Callard, calling to the half-breed, who was in the rear a few paces. "Take the lady's horse by the bridle."

"Back, you scoundrel!" cried Brion. "Captain Callard, begone! I cannot longer keep down my indignation! Your insolence is past all patience!"

"You have heard my instructions, Captain Brion. She refuses to go—I must take her."

"You will take my life first!" retorted Brion, in a resolute tone.

Beavertaker attempted to pass him to reach the side of Mignon, when the excited partisan, rising in his stirrups, unhorsed him in a moment of time.

"By the beard of the prophet Smith! If there's fightin' to be done, I go in for it!" shouted Buckeye, galloping Flash to the spot. "Let me strike this here feller, cap'n!"

Before Brion could grant or refuse the boon asked, the trapper pressed hard against Callard, and gave him a most ungentle push with the muzzle of his rifle.

"Forbear!" cried Brion. "Let there be no quarrel with him."

The captain, meantime, drew a pistol, and Buckeye grasped his wrist to take it from him, when it was accidentally discharged wounding him (Buckeye) slightly in the arm. The ball passed so near Mignon that it grazed her neck, but happily did her no harm.

"Captain Callard, a struggle with us will be useless, and can but result in injury to yourself. Go at once, and think no more of the projects of Pierre Mariot," added Brion.

"Go yonder with me, sir, and I will settle this matter with you, with the bowie-knife or the rifle," returned Callard, thrusting the empty pistol into the holsters.

"Captain Brion, if you have any regard to my wishes, do not listen to such a brutal proposal!" said Mignon, earnestly.

"I have no cause of quarrel with you, and therefore decline your offer!" said the partisan.

"That is a manly answer," asserted Mignon, encouragingly.

"Had Pierre Mariot given me such a challenge, I would not have refused him satisfaction; but I have no wish to slay a man with

whom, until this hour, I never exchanged a dozen words, and who, to my knowledge, never injured me."

"As you will," returned Callard, choking down his anger. "I am only carrying out the wishes of my employer, urged on by the hope of restoring this fair lady to the arms of her father."

"She chooses to return under safer escort than Mariot's, and this affected zeal is not in keeping with your conduct. As long as Miss Bellmar chooses to remain under my protection, no power on earth shall restrain her inclinations."

"One would be disposed to think that the days of knight-errantry are reviving; but this foolish obstinacy on your part may be productive of serious results. Since you will not listen to reason, I must leave you, and rest the termination of the matter with Mariot. I think, captain, you will hear from this affair again, and in a manner at variance with your interest and wishes."

Callard rode away in bad humor, followed by the half-breed.

"That man means to be dangerous," remarked Buckeye.

"If he suffers himself to be led by Mariot, yes," Brion replied.

At that moment a man came to tell the partisan that Balaam was overcome with sleep, fatigue, and exhaustion, and was in danger of falling from his horse. The mountaineer instantly ordered a halt, and the black being disposed of in a comfortable position, slept heavily till dark."

Brion had given orders to forward again, when a firing was heard in the direction of the canon. Mignon was the first to mark the sound, and looked inquiringly at the captain. The latter was assisting her to the saddle; when she was seated, he enjoined silence, and going to a small knoll, turned his practiced ear in the direction of the ominous disturbance. There was a heavy volley, and then a dropping fire, which continued. Brion came back in a few minutes.

"The Indians have attacked our camp," he said.

Buckeye and the whole party confirmed his opinion.

"Yes," asserted the former, "the heathen riptiles are at their old tricks again. Many and many a time have I heard that kind of firing, when the uncivilized buffalo-eaters were astir. They'll never be content and mind their business as long as there's a hoss to steal, or a white trapper's camp to plunder. I allers go in for a scrimmage when they make themselves too free in that way. Flash is great in a runnin' fight, but not quite so handy in a reg'lar bush tussle, where the red niggers skulk from tree to tree."

Balaam approached, much refreshed, singing about a venerable relative "who had no wool on the top of his head, in the place where the wool ought to grow."

"That's a game cretur," continued Buckeye. "Nothin' seems to break him down, though one might nat'rally think that the loss of his night-cap is a solemcolly affair, calkillated to check a happy flow of sperits."

"Go on in dat strain, Buffloeye," quoth Balaam, with an exhibition of ivory.

"You hear that firin', don't ye, Billem? Well, the Ingins have come back arter the rest of your scalp," said Buckeye, in a bantering tone.

"Go 'long, Bullseye! don't 'spose yer limited edication!" retorted Balaam.

"The firing continues, and grows more spirited," said the partisan.

"How are we to reach the camp?" inquired one of the trappers.

"That is yet to be determined, and an undertaking which may be attended with danger. If our friends are surrounded by Blackfeet, it certainly will not be easy to get to them. It is possible, however, that the attack may be confined to one side, in which case we can join our comrades without much difficulty. The real state of affairs must be learned by one experienced in woodcraft, while the rest remain at a prudent distance until the thing is settled. If practicable, we will go to the camp, if not, we must be governed by circumstances."

"That's advised like an old mountaineer, cap'n," said Buckeye. "A better arrangement couldn't be made, considerin' the circumstances. There bein' a woman with us, that woman must be pertected, cost what it may. If there was none but masculines 'mong us, why we might cut our way to camp through a host

of yaller Ingins; but, as I have said, it isn't so; there's one here that must be defended to the last."

"We will proceed to the timber yonder, which is near the canon, where I will leave you in charge of the men, for the protection of Mademoiselle Bellmar, while I reconnoitre the condition of the camp. Judging by the continuous fire, there is a determined conflict going on, with the advantage of numbers on the side of the enemy."

The partisan, having given other premonitory instructions, set forward, on foot, for the scene of the fight, while his little band of trappers, with Mignon, took shelter in the timber.

Brion approached the canon by the most obscure way, covered by pinon and cottonwood. He pushed warily on, until he was enabled to command a tolerably good view of the spot; or more properly a position where, in broad daylight, he could have looked upon its entire length; but darkness now hung over the cliffs, relieved by the flashes of fire-arms only, as the Indians fired down from their hiding-places at the trappers below, and the latter replied by the sharp crack of their rifles. The mountaineer perceived that the attacking party was large, for the sides of the canon were occupied in every accessible place, a blaze leaping from every projecting ledge and rock, from ever ycleft and hole.

Entering the canon, Brion made such a disposition of the trappers as at length repelled the attack of the assailants, after a most obstinate resistance. Having restored comparative quiet, he set out on his return to the timber, where he had left Mignon when he went to reconnoitre the camp. He had passed the most perilous portion of the canon, when an Indian suddenly rose from behind a rock, with upraised tomahawk. With sudden presence of mind Brion parried the descending weapon, and dashed his gun against the Indian's head, and brought him to the ground. He felt for his hatchet, but a feeling of mercy prompted him to hesitate. He gazed in the grim face of the warrior a moment, and slowly taking his foot from his breast, said gently:

"Arise! I could have taken your life, but I will not. Depart in peace!"

The Indian arose, walked a few paces, and turning, said:

"Son of the Yan-kee, Blackbird will not forget this. Then moving silently along the canon he said, 'Son of the Yan-kee, adieu.'"

When Brion had nearly reached the timber, shouts and pistol-shots fell on his ear. Quickening his speed, he soon saw a confused mass of human figures, fighting hand to hand, and Mignon surrounded by a circle of trappers defending her with desperate courage against formidable numbers of Indians. With dauntless daring he made his way among them, and forced the enemy to yield wherever he appeared, and they finally left the field. The little party mounted, and galloped towards the canon, which they entered soon after the moon had arisen. But the Indians gathering in the cliffs above the canon, threatened by their numbers to overwhelm them, Brion sought a place of greater security where he might place Mignon, while the other trappers were engaged in repelling a new attack, and the partisan found himself alone with her.

Being thus thrown together, every moment was freighted with interest. The partisan cared not to speak much; he was better content to gaze silently at Mignon, whose features in the soft moonlight reflected a spiritual beauty.

"Has not the firing ceased?" she asked.

"In the canon, yes," said Brion; "but when the moon is higher, it will be resumed again, unquestionably."

"Be patient with me, my friend, but I believe my physical powers are quite exhausted."

"Nor is it singular that such should be the case. You have passed through extraordinary trials."

"I think you will have to assist me from my horse. It appears to me that I am losing my consciousness."

The partisan sprang from his saddle, and taking Mignon in his arms, placed her tenderly upon a grassy knoll.

"My mouth is burning with thirst. Do I not hear the running of a stream?" she said, languidly. The mountaineer took a drinking cup from the leathern wallet or valise at his saddle, and hastened to look for the rivulet whose babbling was audible. He came back with water, and Mignon drank.

"Thanks, thanks! How kind is Nature to

supply our wants. What so grateful as this pure beverage to the parched lips?" she remarked, returning the cup.

Brion made no answer, but held up his hand warningly. The spot where the parties were resting was a glade near the northern entrance of the canon. On that side next the canon the trees were sparse and of small growth; but the prairie-grass was high, and the shrubbery thick.

"Yonder," said Brion, "I see the grass in motion, as if a large body of savages were creeping through it."

"Heaven keep us from their fury!" exclaimed Mignon.

"So let us trust!"

The mountaineer looked around, to see if some of his party were not in sight, but not one of them was to be seen. He watched a moment longer the peculiar motion of the grass that had excited his suspicions.

"It is true!" he exclaimed. "These red hounds have scented us again! But," he added, turning to Mignon, "Miss Bellmar, I will sell life itself in your defence!"

"Generous defender! I hope your hour is not yet. Cast your eyes about you, and see if some avenue of escape is not open."

"I think we are surrounded; but one consolation remains to me yet."

"What is it?" inquired Mignon, faintly.

"It is the privilege of dying with you!"

"Extends your devotion then so far?"

"To die for you is my duty."

"No, no; I will not accept the sacrifice. Fly at once; escape while you may, and leave me to my fate!" said Mignon, partially rising, excitement lending her strength.

The partisan smiled, but scorned to reply to such a proposition. His calm face never looked so handsome as then to Mignon.

"Ah! it is vain to urge such a consideration upon you! You are firm—you will not go; I read in your eyes, on your lips," added Mignon, in a subdued voice.

"You are right; I would not leave you if a thousand warriors were each thirsting for my blood, and each under a vow to give me a wound."

"And why?"

"Because it is man's duty to protect woman, at all places, under all conditions."

"Is there no other reason?"

Brion's hitherto placid face was suddenly agitated; but he struggled manfully to regain his composure.

"Do you wish me to be perfectly frank?"

"Does the awful danger that encircles us warrant aught but the most entire candor?"

"Evidently, no; but I will say no more until I have made yet another effort to save you."

The mountaineer raised Mignon from the ground and placed her in the saddle. Mounting his own horse, and entreating her to bear up yet a little longer, he took her bridle, and moved toward an opening at the western margin of the glade, which seemed to offer the only chance of escape. He and his fair companion had galloped but a few rods before he perceived that the open space led directly to the canon, and the ground was too rough to be traversed by horse.

"We seem to be indeed lost," said Brion. "But let us dismount; I can carry you in my arms."

"Do not burden yourself with me, my friend! Without me you may elude the savages."

"A burden you will not be. Come, let us hasten along the canon. Ah, but they are very near! Do you not hear those yells? It will be a pleasure to defend you, and a pleasure to die with you. Mignon, I love you!"

"Then death will unite us forever!"

"Death to me will be welcome. Mignon, you are dearer to me than life!"

"My friend, I am yours in life or death, as God may order. We will not be separated."

The partisan took Mignon from her horse, and pressing her to his heart, was bounding away, when a dusky figure appeared in his path. Supporting her with his left arm, he grasped a weapon with his right.

"Son of the pale-face, forbear!" said a deep, calm voice.

"Resist me, and you die!" cried Brion, whose pistol was aimed at the tall, motionless form.

"I seek not your life; if I did, no earthly power could save you," rejoined the Indian.

"Speak not so proudly; we are but man to man; and I think at this moment that the advantage is with me."

"Look!" added the Indian, waving his hand, and emitting a sibilant sound. Brion cast his

eyes around, and saw scores of red faces arising about him as if from the earth.

"Lost!" exclaimed the partisan; but Mignon, though conscious, was too much agitated to speak; she had covered her eyes that she might not see the dreaded visages of the savages.

"Son of the white man, you need not look for those who left you not long ago; they are prisoners," said the Indian.

"I ask nothing for myself; prepare your tortures; but spare the maiden!" exclaimed the mountaineer.

"You do well not to ask mercy of Ravenclaw; you shall both share the same fate. The nature of the red man is cruel!" returned Ravenclaw, with lofty irony.

Mignon unclosed her eyes, and fixed them upon Ravenclaw.

"Lilyface, you are free," he said, with dignity.

"And this brave man—is he not free also?"

"He dies!" replied the Indian, coldly.

"So will all men die, brave chief." While Mignon was speaking, she took the figure of the raven from her bosom, and fastened it to Brion's breast.

"That saves but *one* life," said Ravenclaw.

"Let it be his, then. Son of the Eagle, I am your captive."

Ravenclaw remained silent a moment, then turning to the grim circles of braves, said, authoritatively:

"Warriors, release your prisoners, and return to your lodges."

He did not speak again until every red face had vanished.

"Lilyface, you and your people shall live. I have saved them; yet the red man is cruel, and his nature is stern like flint." Then to Brion:

"Son of the Buffalo, go your way. The daughter of the timid doe has given you life, and saved your trappers from the knives of the Blackfoot braves. Thank the Great Spirit that he has not called you to-night to go on the long trail to the land of souls. Go and take the otter and the beaver, and fulfill your allotted moon on the earth."

With a gesture of indescribable dignity, Ravenclaw walked rapidly from sight, while Brion and Mignon gazed after him in breathless silence, almost in awe.

CHAPTER XX.

MIGNON AN INTERESTED PARTY.

Pierre Mariot was possessed of dogged perseverance, when in pursuit of a coveted object. Opposition sharpened his eagerness, and difficulties quickened his energies. If his intent was bad, it mattered not; the same obstinate firmness marked his movements. His unexpected repulse by Mignon aroused this perverse principle in his nature, and subsequent events put it into full action. The motives that induced her flight to Westport, were, to him, at first, profound mysteries—mysteries, too, which he was feverishly anxious to penetrate. Her escape from his camp, and from that severe espionage which he intended to exercise over her, disappointed, while, at the same time, it provoked him.

That Mignon would put herself under Brion's protection, he was quite sure; and immediately upon the discovery of her flight, conferred with Callard in regard to the best means of again obtaining control of her person, while Beavertaker was sent to watch the movements of the rival band, with instructions to report what he saw as often as practical. He returned at noon on the ensuing day, with the startling intelligence that Mignon had probably been captured by the Crows, and that Captain Brion had started in pursuit with a picked party of trappers. He made the discovery by overhearing a few words while concealed in the bushes near the encampment of the mountaineer, but the particulars were unknown to him. This news perplexed Mariot not a little; but he settled the matter, after some reflection, in this manner: Brion was undeniably both bold and experienced, and would rescue Mignon—if rescue were possible—without his aid or co-operation; hence he need only remain quiet and await the issue. Upon this policy he acted. Through the instrumentality of the half-breed, he was informed, on the following day, of the young lady's rescue, and that she was being conducted to the canon by the brave partisan. It was then that Callard was sent with the message, which, as we have seen, was treated as it deserved by Mignon and the captain.

Beavertaker was then instructed to instigate the Blackfoot warriors (whose minds he had influenced by presents and inflammatory speeches), to attack the trappers encamped in the canon, which he did; while Kincaid, in the disguise of an Indian, led another party against Brion, for the purpose of withdrawing Mignon from her protection, in accordance with the wishes of his employer, Mariot.

The failure of this scheme to obtain the person of Mignon, was a vexatious disappointment, but from which he soon recovered to concoct a new one, in which Headley was to bear some part, influenced by bribes and promises.

"Remain encamped in this vicinity until I have captured this truant damsel, and I will give you such an outfit as you need for the long march before you," said Mariot to Headley.

The intended plan failed, and Mariot now endeavored to work upon Headley, to league with him in his purpose to secure the person of Mignon. He gradually prepared him by an artful detail of such a story as he pleased, and a prolonged conversation followed, in which Mariot developed so much of his plans to his accomplice as he deemed prudent. These plans we will not now detail, as they will be known by subsequent events. In the meantime, we will return to Mignon.

Attended by the partisan and the trappers who had been taken and released by the Indians, by the orders of Ravenclaw, she soon had the satisfaction of reaching a place where she could obtain that rest she so much needed.

But new and powerful emotions agitated her heart; she prayed, she wept, and then, overpowered by fatigue, sank to sleep to pass through again many of the scenes of the last forty-eight hours. When she awoke, she saw the sunbeams creeping in through the apertures of the tent, and knew that her slumbers must have been protracted. She felt no disposition to move, and recalled all that had recently transpired, in the proper order of each particular incident. She remembered, too, as a last link in the chain of events, that something unusual had passed between herself and Captain Brion; the recollection heightened the color of her cheeks, and quickened the pulsations of her heart. She asked if her conduct had been such as became her sex and situation? If she had departed herself with dignity, courage, and delicacy? She trusted that she could answer yes with a tolerably clear conscience, but feared that maturer thought might bring convictions less flattering.

"Come," said Brion, "as you have not breakfasted, you must test the skillfulness of an old French voyageur's cookery—not so varied, perchance, as the fare to which you have been accustomed, but which I trust you will not find wholly unpalatable."

Mignon followed the partisan into the open air. Beneath the cooling shade of an overhanging cliff, upon a small grass plot, was arranged the simple cookery to which Brion had referred, consisting of tender venison, prepared in the best of trapper style, some hard biscuits, and the luxury of coffee—an unpretending meal which they cheerfully discussed.

We have sometimes wished that lovers might remain lovers to the end of their lives, and thus secure the pleasures of a continual affection, tinged with that novelty, freshness, and expectation, that attend the first awakening of that gentle sentiment.

"By the beard of the Prophet Smith!" exclaimed Buckeye, approaching Brion.

"Well?" said the partisan, inquiringly.

"Who do you suppose is looking for you?"

Brion replied that he could not tell.

"It is your old friend, Headley," quoth the trapper, with his accustomed shrug.

"Ah!" said Brion. "What does he want?"

"Beavers and otters! I ain't in his confidence. What's more, I don't want to be. The truth is, I haven't no faith in the cretur. There's a kink in his dispersion that I can't straighten out, no ways. Depend on it, cap'n, there's suthin' in the wind!"

"Possibly not; it's our duty to be charitable, you know. There's no man so bad that he has not some good in him."

"When you find the good spots in Headley, I wish you'd jes' clap your finger on 'em, or make a chalk mark acrost 'em, so they can be discovered by common eyes. Accordin' to my notions of human makin' up, there were a few ingredients left out at the time of his airtly composition; one of them articles was honesty,

which, on the whole, is rather important in creatin' a human bein'."

"Yes," certainly, honesty ought to be remembered, friend Buckeye."

"But in this case it was totally disremembered; but here he comes, and you can make more or less on him, jes' as the notion takes you."

The partisan was already watching the approach of Headley, wondering what the object of his visit might be.

The mutinous trapper drew near with a downcast look.

"Captain Brion," he said, penitently, "I've no right to expect a friendly reception from one whom, I fear, I have treated very unhand-somely."

"Your conduct, Mr. Headley, has been well calculated to forfeit my good will, and your presence in camp cannot be regarded by me as a very welcome event," returned Brion, coldly.

"I expected such a reply; my behavior has merited severe reproof. I came prepared to hear your reproaches patiently, and to confess that I deserve them," returned Headley, in the same humble tones.

"By the beard of Smith, yes!" said Buckeye, in a suppressed voice.

"Before you say more, let me ask why are you hear?" resumed Brion, with considerable sternness.

"To acknowledge frankly, captain, that I have been in fault, and to beg to be restored, partially, at least, to your confidence."

"To have confidence in a man who has forfeited his word, and forgotten his duties, as you have done, will prove exceedingly difficult. I suspect, to one who, like me, is strong in his prejudices. Where are those who went with you?"

"Some of them have joined another band of trappers, and the remainder are on their way to Fort Laramie."

"And the gold-seeking expedition—"

"Is abandoned."

Brion mused a moment.

"Mr. Headley," he added, "if I had any means of testing your sincerity, your apology should be accepted."

"Try me," said Headley, "and if you find one in your band more quick to obey your orders, then you shall be at liberty to doubt my sincerity. My original agreement, I am aware, is forfeited, and I do not ask to be fully reinstated, but merely to be tolerated among you! more, I cannot reasonably expect."

"My nature, sir, is a frank, unsuspecting one. You recollect the old adage, 'to err is human,' etc? I am disposed to overlook your fault, and restore you once more to your place, and I trust my confidence will not be abused."

The parties were standing near Mignon's tent, and at that juncture that young lady appeared.

Headley, who saw Mignon advancing, exhibited considerable surprise, fixing his eyes so intently upon her, that she could not but be aware of his close scrutiny. Her beauty dazzled the unstable Missourian. He had expected to see a masculine young woman, possessed of no more charms than Don Quixote's Dulcinea; therefore, the loveliness of Mignon was a revelation so unexpected, that he could do nothing but stare at the fair apparition, as if bewildered. He could now fathom Mariot's motives, so far as this attractive divinity was concerned. He desired to secure her person, not so much for humanity's sake, as for his own; for it seemed to Headley impossible that one who had once seen Mignon should not love her.

Days passed on, revealing to Headley the felicity of Brion, and the calm trust of Mignon. He was maddened at the successes of one toward whom he had never felt any friendship; and one, too, that his conscience assured him was much his superior in moral attributes and sterling qualities. He saw them walk together, and the sight was hateful to him; he heard them speaking in low and confidential tones, and the sounds were torture to his ears.

The partisan, absorbed in the presence of Mignon, grew daily less observant of Headley, till his movements were entirely unwatched by him. It was then that the Missourian began to take walks by himself, which daily grew longer and extended farther from the camp. As he returned regularly, and departed himself well, no suspicion was excited, so far as Brion was concerned.

One circumstance annoyed the Missourian: he was satisfied that Buckeye had followed him

on more than one occasion, which was a species of espionage threatening to prove fatal to his plans. After many attempts, he succeeded in eluding, he believed, the vigilance of the trapper. The hour was between sunset and dark. By a circuitous route he reached the arm of timber, near which the steel arrow had been so singularly projected by an unseen Bowman, and into the tree upon which the figure of a man had been carved with the point of a knife. A person advanced from the timber and met him, it was the half-breed. Together they passed into the obscurity of the wood, and conferred earnestly for a long time, when Headley hurried back to the canon. At eleven o'clock, when the partisan walked through the encampment, according to his habit, everything was as usual, and he went to sleep with the consciousness that all was safe.

When he visited Mignon's tent in the morning, she was not there. While wondering at the circumstance, Buckeye came to inform him that several of the horses had been stolen during the night, Mignon's among others.

"Where is Headley?" asked Brion.

"He's not to be found," said Buckeye. "By the beard of Smith!"

Brion lost no time in useless repinings over what had happened. That he was perplexed and anxious, will be believed, and needs no affirmation. With characteristic promptness he commenced a search for Mignon. The ground around the tent was thoroughly examined, but it was not of a nature to leave a trail; there was a rocky ridge extending a mile or two from the canon, upon which the foot of man or horse could make no impression. Though sharp-sighted and experienced, the partisan was unable to determine the course of the missing maiden. Under these circumstances, he mounted his horse to make a more general investigation. Buckeye, like a faithful friend, attended the captain, as much interested in the search, apparently, as he.

"I always mistrusted the creature," quoth the trapper, alluding to Headley, "and you remember, perhaps, that I advised you to have nothing to do with him, notwithstanding his penitence."

"Your suspicions were at first shared by me; but his correct deportment afterward restored my confidence," returned the mountaineer.

"I'm not blamin' ye for bein' charitable, 'twere, because charity is what we all need, more or less. I ought to recollect, too, that your mind was too much taken up with that uncommon woman."

The partisan's manly face was suffused for a moment, and he answered:

"It is possible that I have been selfish in my happiness; and upon reflection, I am inclined to think it is so."

"No apologies, cap'n; in such a case it isn't in human nature to be otherwise. She's the puttiest woman alive, and interestin' to match. As old as I am—and I'm a little up'ards of forty—I'm almost fool enough to love her myself."

"What pleasure it gives me to hear you speak so kindly of her!" said Brion, warmly.

"Who could speak otherwise? There's nobody with a heart that knows her that can say anything that isn't to her praise. You'll be a happy man with her; if not, 'twill be your own fault."

"You forget that she may be lost to me forever?"

"That's a supposable case, but I can't make up my mind to it, yet. She'll turn up somewhere, dead or alive, when you ain't expectin' her. I shall travel a great many miles afore I give her up, nor despair in one day or two, or in a week or a month. Flash can carry me like a bird, and won't mind a thousand miles of travel scarcely at all, 'specially when he knows who he's arter; in fact, the quadruped needs exercise rather, to lubricate his joints, like."

"Buckeye!" exclaimed the partisan, "your friendship gives me courage, and makes me think better of my fellow-men."

"Beard of Smith! it's like your charitable nature to say that. But that's not to the point, exactly. I wonder where Callard and his band may be about this time?"

"On the march, and far ahead of us, doubtless. Ah! if it was not for this unfortunate affair, we might hope to overtake them. Clearly, they will reach the trapping-grounds first."

"It can't be helped; you've labored under peculiar difficulties, and isn't in the power of man to control circumstances so they'll work jest to one's mind. The best of us are short-

sighted mortals, and can't see much beyond our noses. Providence deals with us precisely as it's mind to, knowin' the end from the beginnin'. Worryin' never did nobody no good, and never will as long as the irth sarcumnavergates the air. We must submit to what comes with becomin' submission, knowin' its from above, or somewheres in that d'rection."

"I have endeavored to do my best for my employers."

"I'll make oath to it in a court of justice, with my hand on the Bible! It's true that you stopped a few days, but humanity required that you should. Redpath, himself, couldn't be so much of a savage as to go on and leave an honest fellow-man in sickness and distress, no matter what his complexion might happen to be. No, no! such barbarity couldn't be found. The wounded and sick must be taken care of, fur or no fur; whether companies get rich or not. Them's my notions, and I'm forty and up'ards."

"My own, too."

"It's equally your duty to look after this Mignon, let what will come of it."

"That is my fixed determination; but tell me, my friend, where shall we look?"

"In several directions; Headley must be found, if it takes a month; and perhaps you'll have to push on after Callard—there's no knowin'. And as for Pierre Mariot, he deserves lynchin'!"

"He's a villain!"

"As wicked a scamp as ever walked the prairies, Headley excepted."

"I have had a thought which perhaps I ought not to speak, but which, nevertheless, has given me some uneasiness."

"Speak it, cap'n, 'less it's somethin' compromisin' the integrity of that uncommon female; in which case you'd better be silent."

"I recollect that Headley tried to make himself very agreeable to Miss Bellmar."

"Beard of Smith! I'm 'shamed of you, cap'n. I can see what you're drivin' at, and advise you to drop the subject where 'tis. I've never seen the gal that knew her own mind better, though I'm forty and up'ards."

"I thank you, Buckeye; I certainly do wrong to doubt her."

"Depend on't, wherever she's gone, it's agin her will. She isn't one of the flighty kind, taken with every decentish face, and deceived by every artful tongue."

"That is but justice to her good sense. I shall ask her pardon for entertaining a thought even, not to her credit."

"I'll see that you don't forget it, cap'n. She's equal to any of the saints in the calendar, and you deserve to do penance, as 'twere."

"We must search for the villain, Headley; and I shall give myself no rest until I have found his lurking-place; I will cross prairies, I will climb mountains, I will cross valleys and rivers, and dare every peril of a savage country in this pursuit. My friend, I have an extraordinary incentive to exertion; you see that Mignon charms all; her beauty touches the heart of the red man, even; while her goodness, kindness and gentleness win the friendship of the rough mountaineer. Yesterday, I was happy, for Mignon was near me, but to-day I am miserable, for I no longer see her face, nor hear her voice."

They rode on in silence, examining closely all the route for miles. Just at sunset, Brion struck a fresh trail leading to the water and both he and Buckeye swung their horses to the other side. It was now too dark to follow the trail with certainty, and they encamped for rest and refreshment. But the partisan could not tranquilize his mind to repose, and finding the effort to sleep irksome, he softly arose the moment he judged Buckeye to be asleep, and passed out of the tent, and started anew in search of the trail. He went on until he came to a hill, which he climbed, and passed over to the other side. At its base was an impassable chaparral, and he turned aside to the south. He soon came to a dell surrounded by red cedar and pines, where he found the remains of a fire still smoking.

While Brion stood reflecting whether to continue his solitary reconnoissance or return to Buckeye, he was startled by a loud and triumphant laugh near him. Raising his eyes and partially turning round, Brion beheld a spectacle which sent the blood thrilling through his veins with unwonted rapidity; he was surrounded by stalwart warriors, whose dusky features looked grim and terrible in the darkness. In advance of the rest, and scarcely three yards from the mountaineer, stood one

whose dress and bearing indicated him to be a chief.

"And so the cunning Fox has come to the hunter?" said he, repeating the laugh that had so electrified the partisan. "Has the Fox become a fool, that he thrusts his paw into the trap?"

"The most cunning are not always upon their guard, and an old squaw may sometimes surprise the panther sleeping on a tree," said Brion.

"I trapped you once before, but the heart of Ravenclaw was soft. The eyes of Lillyface turned his blood to water. Wily trapper, you will not live to see the next new moon. Last year, Prairiewolf scented you upon Snake River, when you were catching the beaver, but he could not catch you; now he has got his hand on you, and you cannot escape. What have you to say?"

"That I will give you much for liberty," responded Brion.

"Do you give liberty to the otter when you have taken it? Do you spare the buffalo when you are hungering for his flesh? Do you say to the panther, go in peace, when you have levelled your rifle at her heart? Fox, you have lost your cunning!"

"I have guns and ammunition, hatchets and hunting-knives, beads, bells, and mirrors, and strong horses," replied the trapper.

"It is not so; you have nothing; not even life. Listen, we have a vow to kill the first living thing that came among us. White man, such vows are never broken."

"I have heard of such a custom prevailing among your people; but it is a cruel and useless one. If I must be sacrificed, it will make but little difference whether I die to night or three days hence, therefore give me three days liberty, and at the expiration of that time I will return, when you can fulfill your vow."

"Wa-wa! I was right when I said the Fox was growing foolish; he is getting into his dotage."

"I swear by the Great Spirit, that I will return and surrender myself a prisoner, to suffer the death you have determined upon!" added Brion, with emphasis.

"Paleface, that cannot be! Even if you came back, Ravenclaw might again give you life; but I will not trust you; your heart is not big enough to keep your word. If you come, it would be with your hunters at your heels, with their rifles cocked and at their faces. Prairiewolf is not a child, that he should be deceived by words, which are as smoke curling from the top of a wigwam, to pass away into the air and be remembered no more."

The partisan felt a cold, sickly sensation creeping over him, his blood seemed to flow back upon his heart with horror; he experienced an instinctive shrinking that reached to his very marrow. Prairiewolf eyed him, a mocking smile on his lips.

"Prairiewolf, when the Master of Life calls for us, we must go; but the white man has different notions from the savage. His flesh is more sensitive to the fire than the red man's, because he has never been taught to despise its tortures. If nothing but my death will suffice, strike your knife into my breast and let me pass at once to the hunting-grounds."

"A squaw might die in that way; a great chief like you deserves a more honorable death."

A brave approached to bind Brion's hands. Resolved to secure a sudden death or escape; with his hatchet he struck the savage down at Prairiewolf's feet, and bounded from the dell with the speed of a deer. But there were those after him swift of foot and tireless in pursuit; and having scarcely three yards the start of his pursuers, the mountaineer could hardly hope for success. He was overtaken, carried back, and bound in a manner to preclude the possibility of a second attempt.

"You are not quick enough!" said Prairiewolf, tauntingly. "A boy could run faster."

"But a boy could not do that!" retorted Brion, pointing to the body of the brave whom he had stricken.

"We shall see," resumed Prairiewolf, fiercely, "how you will bear up under the ordeal of the twelve fires!"

"The will of God be done!" replied Brion, commending himself to that Being who is apt to be forgotten in prosperity, and remembered only in adversity.

CHAPTER XIII.

BRION'S ESCAPE.

"Is the moon up, cap'n?" said Buckeye, rubbing his eyes. There not being any response, he added, presently, "I s'pect it's about time to be stirrin'."

The silence remained unbroken, Buckeye arose and turned to the spot where he supposed Brion to be slumbering.

"Beard of the prophet Smith! He isn't here! Well, he can't be fur off, that's sartin. Perhaps he's gone after the horses. No he hasn't, neither; for there they stand in plain sight."

"By the book of Mormon!" exclaimed Buckeye, suddenly. "Somebody's arter the cap'n's hoss!"

His observant eye had detected a man crouched in the grass in the act of cutting the side-line from the trapper's steed.

"Look this way!" shouted Buckeye.

The thief obeyed, not certain that the words were addressed to him; but all doubts were dispelled when he saw the trapper's long rifle covering his head.

"If your life's worth anythin' in partic'lar to ye, get up and come this way, and try to remember that, if you run, I'll drop you as I would a 'tarnal catamount!"

The detected offender reluctantly advanced, revealing no less a personage than the half-breed.

"Oh! it's you, is it? Well, this is nice kind of business for a cretur with white blood in his veins. I s'pect there's no other branch of industry that you can git into," said Buckeye, as Beavertaker approached.

"With the people with whom I live, horse-stealing is not esteemed a crime, but rather a virtue," returned Beavertaker.

"Well, jest clap down on your knees and say over a little sunthin', and I'll give ye a bit of a lift toward the half-breed kentry. I s'pect you haven't got Ingin blood enough in ye to care any great about a death-song, and as for your explites, it won't take long to tell 'em."

At that instant, something fell softly at Beavertaker's feet, who, thereupon, evinced much agitation.

"Beavers and otters! it's an arrow!" exclaimed Buckeye.

But the half-breed was too much terrified to speak.

"You look 'mazin' white about the mouth, and I reckon there's a heap of meanin' in this little messenger. Come, half-breed, find your tongue."

"Yes, there is indeed meaning in it," answered Beavertaker, striving to master his fears. "It tells me that my life hangs on a thread—it warns me to begone, and appear no more in the country of the Blackfeet, on pain of death."

"Tis the work of Redpath!" said the trapper, in a subdued voice. "The unknown cretur is near; his noiseless feet are walkin' around us; his eagle eyes are seein' us, and his quiver is full of these polished instruments o' death."

"There is too much truth in what you say. I shall tarry no longer amid these hills; I must direct my footsteps to some distant spot where the name of Redpath is unknown."

"If that's the case, then free your conscience at once, and you'll go lighter for havin' cast off a great burden of deviltry," advised Buckeye.

"There is one thing I regret," added the half-breed, with some show of remorse.

"That's right; I'm glad to hear ye say so; it makes half-breed human natur appear to better advantage. Tell me what it is that you're sorry for?"

"I will; it is that I sold myself to Pierre Mariot."

"And well you may, for he is a villain. As it can't now make any difference to you, either in regard to your pay or future prospects, inform me what Mariot has been tryin' to do?"

"At first his object was to destroy the trappers of the American Fur Company."

"That I have found out already," said the trapper.

"When Mignon appeared," resumed Beavertaker, "and went over to Brion's party, it then became his great object to obtain possession of her person, and, by a series of persecutions, overcome her objections to his wishes."

"And what might his wishes be?"

"To make her Madame Mariot, of course."

"I have yet another question to ask."

"Ask it."

"Can you tell me where Mademoiselle Belle mar is now?"

"She is traveling toward the Plains as fast as fleet horses can carry her. She is with Mariot, and Headley was his instrument. But the end is not yet; Headley loves her, and there will be a struggle between the two."

"Beard of Smith! Jest what I thought! Put two scoundrels together to serve the devil, and directly they'll go to cuttin' each other's throat. What trail is that the cap'n and I have been followin'?"

"That of a small party of Blackfeet, who have sworn never to return to their village without a prisoner."

"Ah, that gives me an idea! Depend on't, the cap'n's in trouble. It's probable that the thought of Mignon kept him awake, and he got up and followed this trail, and has been taken by this war party. By Joe Smith's beard! I must be after him."

"Madman, stop! you will but go to share his fate!"

"Share his fate? I'm willin' to—I'm willin' to, if I can't save him. What is fire to a trapper? It's nothin'! All the fire in the world can't burn up the immortal principle of an honest man!" said Buckeye, with fervor.

"Follow your destiny, and I will mine. Time is passing, and to me it is the same as life. But I turn my back upon these familiar scenes with sorrow; I love the prairies and the wide skies over them; the mountains have become dear to me, and I love to hunt the buffalo upon the great hunting-grounds of the red man. I go, and we shall never meet again. Honest trapper, farewell!" Beavertaker said no more, but turning away, was soon out of sight.

"The kentry's relieved," said the trapper; "it'll breathe easier, feel better, and stan' longer, I dare say. It can't be said that Redpath hasn't done some good, pervidin' he's had a hand in the matter; for one, I'm obliged to him, be he man or demon. But I mustn't forget for an instant that the cap'n's in danger. I'll hop on to Flash, and it shall go hard with me if I don't find him. Flash can scent an Ingin as far as a dog can his master."

Buckeye hastily saddled his horse, and leaving Brion's animal to shift for himself, was soon in motion. With his nose near the ground, Flash followed the trail of the mountaineer.

When Flash had gone on in this manner for a half or three quarters of an hour, he stopped, snuffed the air, and shook his head.

"He smells the creturs!" said Buckeye; "they're near—I never knew him to fail." He dismounted, and stood a moment beside his horse.

"Flash," said he, gently, stroking the creature's neck with his hand, "we've been friends a great while, and it wouldn't be like ye to desert me now. Stay here and be as still as death. If I don't see ye agin, but go under, the same as a good many better men have, don't never let an Ingin riptile swing his leg across your back."

Stooping until his figure presented but half its usual attitude, the trapper glided onward and soon reached the dell, where active preparations were being made for the death of the prisoner.

The savages had already fixed twelve green stakes in the ground, and were gathering heaps of fagots. To Buckeye, this was a mournful spectacle; he gazed from his place of concealment with mingled feelings of horror and indignation. He felt himself in a dreadful dilemma; he could witness the agonies of his friend with but little chance of aiding him, or he could fly for assistance back to the canon, with the terrible fear following him at every step that he might be too late to save his life. Thus he remained. Knowing that it would be rash to undertake anything in favor of Brion against such numbers, he concluded to go for assistance, hoping, by dint of hard riding, to return in season to save the captain's life. Creeping back, he mounted Flash, and rode away as fast as his fleet limbs could carry him.

Meantime, the partisan was lying upon the ground in the most painful position. He saw the green stakes driven, the fagots brought, dry pine splinters prepared, and various other arrangements calculated to shake the sternest resolution. He had abandoned himself to his fate with a kind of despairing apathy, when a sudden recollection, like a gleam of light, flashed through his mind.

"Prairiewolf," said he, "is it not the will of the Great Spirit that I should die now?"

"White men talk often of the Great Spirit," replied the chief, ironically. "Why do you think he has not called you, and that you shall live longer upon the earth?"

"Unbutton my hunting-frock, and you will find that beneath it which will answer your question."

Bending over Brion, he tore open his frock, and there was revealed to his wondering sight the figure of a raven wrought in beads. Prairiewolf stood silent and confounded; rage and disappointment were pictured upon his visage.

"Accursed Fox!" he exclaimed. "Some of your cunning yet remains. This is indeed a mighty medicine. I will show it to my warriors, and hear what they say."

Prairiewolf took the talisman, and, going away a little distance, called his braves around him, when considerable talking followed in low tones. Presently the chief returned, and giving the mountaineer the memento that seemed to possess such power, said:

"You were right, pale-face; your time has not come; you may yet live many moons to trap the otter and the beaver. See! I cut your bands; rise up; you are free!"

The mountaineer sprang lightly to his feet, and the fear of a painful death rolled back from his soul. He stretched out his arms—he shook himself like an impatient steed—a sense of freedom made him happy.

"Tis the providence of God!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said Prairiewolf, "it is a great thing that has happened. There is your way—go; but remember that you shall yet feel the claws of Prairiewolf!"

"To thank you for my life, would be giving you too much credit for humanity; I shall therefore reserve my gratitude for one more powerful than thou. Adieu, unfriendly red man!"

A brave advanced and handed Brion his rifle; throwing the weapon upon his shoulder, he walked from the camp of his enemies with a firm and dignified step.

Brion took the way he had come, and as he increased the distance between himself and the savages, quickened his pace.

"Wabuma!" said a voice near the mountaineer, at the moment when he was passing the chaparral adverted to in another place. The partisan cocked his rifle, and looked for the speaker, who immediately emerged from the mezquit at his left.

"What is your purpose?" questioned Brion, presenting his rifle.

"To pay a debt I owe you!"

"I know you not," added the captain.

"Yan-kee, I am Blackbird, son of the Raven," rejoined the Indian.

The partisan eased the hammer of his rifle-lock softly back upon the unbroken cap, and dropped the breach of the weapon to the ground.

"Ah! I remember."

"Wabuma, attend thou! When yonder war-party set out I was not ready, for I had certain rites to perform necessary to insure success; I overtook them this morning, after you had given Prairiewolf the great medicine."

"Go on," said Brion.

"Prairiewolf cut your bonds, and said: 'Arise; you are at liberty: arise and depart.'"

"Yes," added Brion, wondering at what Blackbird was coming to.

"But," resumed the Indian, "he spoke deceitfully, and there was wickedness in his heart. Yan-kee, he has planned your death. When you pass yonder spring, two braves will spring upon you and dispatch you with their tomahawks. Prairiewolf has sent them there for that purpose; they are crouching in the grass, waiting the sound of your coming."

"Blackbird, behold how the Great Spirit rewards me for a merciful act!"

"Wa-wa! the Master of Life is just; he never forgets, and his red children are like him."

"Do you not fear the consequence of betraying this secret?" Brion asked.

"I would have warned you of this if the twelve fires that were to be lighted for you were to be my only reward for the deed. I will repay the debt I owe you, though they thrust my flesh full of blazing splinters, and burn out my tongue."

"My brother," said Brion, with increased earnestness, "I regret that my people do not better understand your race. I would to God that mutual hatred might no longer exist; that jealousy and bloodshed might cease forever."

"Yan-kee, I have given life for life; go your way, and remember that Blackbird did not prove ungrateful."

The Indian vanished like a spirit—so quickly did he glide into the tangled depths of the chaparral—and the partisan, changing his course, made a detour to the right, thus avoiding the ambush of the wily Prairiewolf. He reached the spot where he had left Buckeye, found his horse quietly feeding, but, of course, saw nothing of the trapper or Flash.

It was now daylight. Thinking it probable that Buckeye was looking for him, Brion concluded to remain in that vicinity for a while, believing that he should be more likely to find him in that way than by searching for him. He did not, by any means, intend to slumber but having slept none during the night, Nature proved stronger than his resolution, and he fell into an unquiet slumber, in which he dreamed of the Blackfeet and Mignon. He was aroused from his somnolency by sounds that would not have been noticed by one who had not passed many years in a country where constant watchfulness was required, but whose proved to be produced by human feet; for the first object that met the mountaineer's gaze was a man who was looking wistfully at his horse.

"Stranger," said Brion, "what brings you here?"

The individual, who obviously had not seen the partisan, now turned toward him, with a start indicative of surprise.

"Ah," added Brion, immediately, "I think we have met before?"

"Yes, and not much to my advantage," replied the man, pointing to a wound upon his head.

"You received that little memento of my good-will at the timber near the canon," continued the partisan.

"I am pretty well aware of it," said Kincaid.

"This meeting, I perceive, is opportune; I have some questions to propose to you, which I hope you will answer without prevarication. My first question is: Can you inform me where Pierre Mariot is?"

"I shall not answer," said Kincaid.

"My next," resumed Brion, "is this: Is Miss Bellmar with him?"

"I reply to that as to the other question."

"Villain!" exclaimed Brion.

"If that suits you, why let it be so," replied the Frenchman, with a sneer.

"You were, doubtless, about to appropriate my horse."

"I supposed it to be an estray."

"No apologies; horse-stealing, I presume, could easily be reconciled to your conscience; you are not tender, I think. But as the civil questions I have asked remain unanswered, I will propose another: Tell me if you have any knowledge of the movements of Headley?"

"I have."

"That is well; where is he?"

"That is something I did not agree to tell you."

"A truce to this obstinacy! I am intensely interested in Miss Bellmar, and the movements of Headley and Mariot; tell me where to find them, and I will make it worth your trouble."

"Oh, you will buy me?"

"If it does not go beyond my means, yes. Name your price?"

"You spoke of buying my knowledge; what will you give?"

"What do you demand?"

"There is your horse; it is a fine one; I will accept him as a gift, and in return for your kindness, tell you all I know of Mademoiselle Bellmar and Mariot," said Kincaid, with a cool effrontery provoking to Brion, who was loth to part with an animal he valued highly.

"It is a hard bargain you are driving with me, but I will compromise matters by giving you the price of the animal in money, or such goods as I have at the encampment," he answered.

"No, that will not do; I'll have the horse, or it's no trade, and not a word passes my lips; so choose, and that quickly, for I want to be off," he said.

"You are indeed a pitiful knave, and it taxes my patience sorely to keep from laying violent hands upon you; nevertheless, if these are your easiest terms, I accept."

"Saddle him and bring him here, and place the bridle rein in my hand, that I may be sure there is no trickery about it."

With a sigh of regret, and something like remorse, the partisan complied with this request. Kincaid took the bridle and threw it over the animal's neck. The horse, resenting this familiarity from a stranger, or frightened at the suddenness of the act, reared and backed, Kincaid retiring with him until he was several yards from the mountaineer, then springing with agility to the saddle, gave him the rein, and struck his flanks with his heels. In a second, he was galloping away.

Brion drew up his rifle with the intention of wounding the rascal, but it missed fire. Kincaid had taken off the cap while he was saddling the horse.

"Put on a cap!" shouted the Frenchman, looking back over his shoulder.

At that instant, the partisan saw a gleam of light passing through the air; Kincaid cried out like one in mortal pain, and fell headlong from the horse.

Brion hastened to him; he found him upon the ground in the agonies of death. A steel-headed arrow had passed through his lungs, and the glittering point was visible near the spinal column beneath the shoulder.

He fixed his glassy eyes upon the mountaineer.

"It is ended!" said he, in a husky voice.

"I'm dying. My fears were prophetic—Redpath has stricken me. I wished for your horse to leave this accursed region—but it is useless to struggle with fate. But I will confess this. Miss Bellmar is with Mariot and Headley; you will find them somewhere on the trail to the city of the Great Salt Lake. Raise me up."

Brion did so, supporting him with his will-
ing arms.

"When the breath has left me, honest Brion, tie a heavy stone to my body, and sink it in the waters of the Nebraska."

"Yes," said Brion, "I will do it."

"That is all; it grows darker—the portals are grim and horrible—but—but death is eternal—eternal sleep!"

Kincaid never spoke again.

CHAPTER XIV.

A NEW-COMER IN THE FIELD.

"If death is an eternal slumber," mused Brion, "then he who has lived the best in the world will sleep the most tranquilly. This clod was but recently a man, now it is insensate matter, ready to return to the great body of nature, whence it was derived."

"Beard of the immortal Joe!" cried a well-known voice, and thereupon the partisan felt himself hugged as if in the embraces of a bear. "Beavers and otters! guns and gunpowder!"

The reader will perceive that Buckeye had returned.

"Well, cap'n, this is what I call sing'lar! Why, I didn't much expect to see you ag'in in the earthly tabernacle of your nat'ral body!"

"A spirit has not flesh and bones as ye see me have," said Brion, sharing fully in Buckeye's gladness.

"In course not, for in that case one couldn't never 'spect to reach the new Jeroosalem unless he went up in a billoon; for the force of gravity, you know, would keep him rooted to the natural sile. How, in the name of Smith, did you git clear of the Ingin creturs?"

"First, let me ask, my friend, how you learned that I was a prisoner?"

"Why, I discovered ye, in course, and saw the riptiles drivin' green stakes into the ground to the number of twelve and up'ards."

"You took the trail?"

"Flash and I, yes. I must say that I found ye in a bad predicament. Twelve fires! three days! great Smith!"

"I perceive you are acquainted with the whole affair."

"That mixed individuoal the Ingins call Beaver-taker has been here, and he told me about the war-party and their vow; and you bein' gone, I put that and that together, and made up my mind what had happened, which was confirmed by goin' arter ye. But, by the beard! what have you here?"

"You can examine and satisfy yourself."

"The body of a man with an arrow driven through his lungs, the p'int stickin' from the back."

"True," said Brion.

"Beavers and otters! let us hear about it."

The partisan stated the circumstances of the case.

"'Tis the work of Redpath!" added Buckeye, in an under tone. "He is yet at his old trade: he's near us by night and by day; he's never asleep; his foot never tires, and his quiver is never empty."

"A wily foe," returned Brion.

"And not only wily but terrible!" resumed the trapper.

"Terrible to those whom he marks for destruction; to others he may be quite different."

"It wouldn't be strange if we should foller arter them that has felt his power, and gone under the sile. We ought to think of the futur, and be ready to go at a second's warnin'. In case I should be the fust to give up airthly things, I want you to take Flash and be a good master to him—the faithful brute."

"It's my opinion you are destined for a long life and a happy one; nevertheless, should I outlive you, Flash shall never want care and attention; he shall receive no stinted rations of provender, his work shall be light, and he shall die of old age."

"That sounds right and proper, and arranges all my airthly matters, with the exception of my rifle and sich like, which you must keep in remembrance of Buckeye—the free trapper."

"A brave soldier frequently makes his will while going to battle; but let us hope that I shall not execute yours until I am myself a very old man. Now tell me where you have been; to get help, I dare say?"

"Yes, I started for the canon, but met one of your old trappers well mounted, and sent him with the news of your capture. Before noon, twenty-five brave fellers will be here—chaps that won't shrink from a skirmish."

"We shall need them, possibly, for another purpose."

"To pursue Mariot and Headley?"

"That is my design," said Brion. "But I must attend to the last wish of this poor fellow, which was to give him a burial in the waters of the Nebraska."

The body was lifted upon Brion's horse and carried to the river, to the summit of a cliff overhanging the water. While they were preparing it for its final resting-place, a horseman was seen upon the opposite bank, who, perceiving the mountaineers, called to them, desiring to know if the river was fordable. The captain informed him that there was a sand-bar reaching two-thirds of the distance across, but, notwithstanding, he would in some places find it beyond his horse's depth.

The stranger attempted the passage, succeeding very well until within twenty yards of the shore, when—the horse not being a very powerful swimmer, and the water being deep and swift—he was borne downward with the current and his life endangered. The partisan perceiving his peril, did not hesitate to plunge into his rescue, which, happily, he effected. The man was taken from the water much exhausted. He proved to be a Frenchman.

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed he, reviving from the effects of his bath. "I am getting too old to travel in such a barbarous country. Ma foi! I should have been drowned, but for your friendly aid."

"Then by being here was providential," replied Brion.

"Evidently so; thanks be to the Divine Being!" said the stranger, fervently.

"We were performing a melancholy service when you appeared, which we will now complete. We were on the point of committing the mortal remains of a fellow-being to the keeping of this river."

"Indeed! a sad affair to perform in this great solitude; one of your companions, doubtless?"

"Guns and gunpowder, no!" exclaimed Buckeye. "We don't associate with sich."

"Please come this way, sir," requested Brion.

"Diable! he was shot with an arrow!" cried the Frenchman.

"And it was a fate he richly deserved, though we shouldn't judge too harshly of our feller-creters," said Buckeye.

"He was a bad man, then?"

"He hadn't no principles, whatsomever; he was in the employment of Pierre Mariot, partner in the firm of Bellmar & Mariot, of Westport," rejoined the trapper.

The Frenchman seemed astounded, looking from Brion to Buckeye and from Buckeye to Brion, as if he could not well credit what had been affirmed.

"It appears to work you up somewhat, stranger; but sich a spettacolo as this may nat'rally

do so. Perhaps you've heard of Redpath, and perhaps you haven't; but whether you have or haven't—and it probably don't make no great odds—just look afore ye, and you'll see a specimen of his work."

"This is most wonderful!" said the stranger, trembling with excitement. "I have heard of Redpath. I hope this is the only white man he has killed—within your knowledge?"

"I wish it was, but it isn't, by no means; several have felt his arrows and knocked under—as 'twere."

The Frenchman now looked attentively at the partisan.

"If I mistake not," he said, "this is Captain Brion, the famous mountaineer?"

"My name is Brion," replied the captain, modestly, "but I believe I am not very famous."

"Thanks to the intercession of the saints! this is well. Perhaps you can tell me something concerning my daughter, Mignon?" said the Frenchman, hurriedly.

"Oters! are you the old gentleman!" exclaimed Buckeye. "Well, I may say the cap'n has behaved real handsome toward the gal. He's been the same as a father to her, and brother, too, for that matter, with a little sister thrown in. Bless you, sir, he's run all sorts of risk! twelve fires—three days—roastin'—pine splinters, and so on."

"For which he will accept a father's gratitude. Lead me to her at once."

"I'm not much in the habit of advisin' people older nor myself, but if I might be allowed to speak in a case like this, I should say keep down your nat'ral feelin's till we find her. When she's once diskivered, you can be led to her, I reckon; but till then, I don't think it can be done. The truth is, that uncommon woman slipped away from us when we wasn't expectin' it; if it hadn't been for that circumstance, you wouldn't have seen us here, for we're arter her."

Mr. Bellmar's countenance indicated the depths of his disappointment, while Brion proceeded to explain the matter as well as he could; in addition to which, he made a general statement of all that had happened to Mignon, as far as he knew.

"I trust," said Monsieur Bellmar, after a pause, "that my daughter's deportment has been at all times such as becomes one of her years and sex?"

"Guns and gunpowder! if she'd been Queen of England, she couldn't conducted herself no better! I say it without meanin' no hurt to anybody of her kind; but I've never seen her equal, on the prairies or off, in towns or cities, and I'm forty and up'ards."

Buckeye spoke with particular enthusiasm, rounding the final period with a vigorous cut of his right hand through the air.

Bellmar looked gratefully at the trapper, of whose sincerity he had not a doubt, his earnestness fully attesting to his honesty.

CHAPTER XV. CONCLUSION.

Leaving these parties, we return once more to Mignon. She had retired as usual, but a little after midnight was awakened by a sense of suffocation, and discovered that a handkerchief was tied tightly across her mouth, and her hands firmly held by a man, who instantly raised her in his arms, and bore her swiftly from the tent.

"Be quiet, mademoiselle! no personal injury or disrespect is intended," said a voice, which she recognized as Headley's. Mignon struggled, and attempted to alarm the camp; but against Headley her feeble strength availed nothing. She was soon clear of the canon, when she was placed upon a horse; but the handkerchief was not removed until she had ridden as far as the timber, where Headley was joined by Beavertaker, who had just reached the spot with several horses, her own among the number which, as the reader knows, he had stolen.

Mignon being free from the restraint of the handkerchief, was of course at liberty to express her indignation at such an outrage; a privilege of which she did not hesitate to avail herself.

"Mademoiselle Bellmar, I am acting under the influence of a passion that masters me. Do not hold me responsible for my deeds; indeed, you have driven me mad!" said he.

"You screen yourself under a miserable subterfuge! You cannot disguise from me the fact that you are acting under the instructions of Pierre Mariot," Mignon replied.

"In adoring you, I most certainly do not act under his orders," returned the Missourian.

"Tell me your purpose?" said Mignon.

"My hope is that at some future time you will come to regard me in a manner far more kindly," responded Headley, with an air of humility.

"If you would have such hope realized, conduct me whence you have taken me," she replied.

"That I cannot consent to do; though if you will, I will save you from annoyance from Mariot."

"That you may annoy me yourself! Yes, I see; but the change will not be welcomed by me. I demand my liberty; and you cannot, if a man of honor, refuse my wish. When woman sues, man should not be inflexible."

"I could witness your death with more calmness than your return to Captain Brion, Miss Bellmar!" he exclaimed, with emphasis.

"Then entreaties are vain; and it only remains for me to submit to my fate, begging, however, to be treated with the deference due to my sex and honor," said Mignon, despairingly.

"You can do no more and no better, mademoiselle. If you prefer, you may ride your own horse, you perceive he is here?"

"Yes, I prefer to ride Brave, suffer me to do so." It was some alleviation of her distress to find herself upon her favorite steed again; and she indulged also a secret hope that she might escape by reason of his speed, by taking advantage of some moment when Headley was less watchful. She observed that blankets had been cut in pieces and tied upon the horses' feet to render the trail indistinct; also that the hardest ground was chosen to favor the same intent. The party crossed the Nebraska before sunrise, upon a raft that had been constructed for that purpose, which was destroyed when they reached the shore. Mignon's patience and firmness was then put to a severe test, for Mariot joined them, accompanied by Kincaid, but the latter immediately left with Beavertaker, and did not return.

Mariot affected a dignity and reserve which Mignon knew was foreign to his character, and which was assumed to cover his designs from Headley, also to awe the fair captive into silence and respect.

They now traveled very fast, Pierre being careful to keep at some distance from the young lady, wishing to escape her keen questioning, and deserved rebuke. Mignon quickened the pace of Brave and rode to his side. She desired to be informed by what authority he assumed the control of her person, and where he intended to conduct her. Mariot replied to the effect that she must content herself not to know at present, but that all, eventually, would result to her advantage.

This was unsatisfactory; Miss Bellmar urged her just interrogatories with becoming spirit. The Frenchman finally grew angry, and reproached her for rejecting him at Westport, accusing her also of unmaidenly conduct in placing herself under the protection of Captain Brion, a rough and rude trapper, not fit for the companionship of one gently reared, and possessed of lady-like and refined instincts.

"Evil-minded, invidious man!" exclaimed Mignon, vexed and wounded by his base intimations. "My aversion for your character momentarily increases. Think not to shake my constancy of purpose, or conquer my contempt for you."

Headley, who was riding in the rear, hearing the altercation, rode up, and reproved Mariot for his bad temper, though in language not offensive. Pierre choked down his resentment, and no more conversation of that nature ensued.

As many of Headley's men as Mariot was able to mount, had been sent forward the day previous; these they overtook before night; they were to wait for the remainder at a certain place known to Beavertaker and Kincaid, who were to meet them upon the stolen horses, and conduct them there by another route.

Mignon complained of fatigue, and requested Headley to encamp for the night—an artifice which she hoped would prove advantageous to Brion, who, she doubted not, would be able to find the trail, notwithstanding all the precautions taken. Mariot objected to this proposal, wishing to hurry on as fast as possible till morning. A difference of opinion thereupon arose, which was decided by vote among the men, and against the judgment of Mariot. This circumstance engendered ill-feeling be-

tween the leaders, which, enhanced by mutual jealousy, showed itself often the following day. Mignon foresaw a quarrel, which, possibly, might produce some change in her favor, yet inwardly fearing the crisis that seemed approaching. The same scene in regard to camping was enacted at the close of the second day, with the same results. Mignon slept, and was hopeful—more hopeful than at any time since her abduction.

The morning sun arose with peerless brightness. Nature was glorious in her beauty. The wide-spreading prairies exhaled life and fragrance. The little camp was astir. Mignon stood near Brave, with her eyes turned trustfully toward the Wind River Mountains, from which she was daily receding. Could she forget the scenes that had transpired at the feet of those mighty ranges? Never! They had impressed their thrilling events upon her soul, to remain there as long as life and memory lasted.

Mariot approached. Mignon remarked that his face wore a gloomy expression. Headley followed him; both stopped a few paces from her.

"I hope," she said, addressing Mariot, "that you have come to tell me that you regret what you have done?"

"No," he moodily replied; "I only regret your perverseness."

"How will you account for your conduct to my father?" resumed Mignon.

"That need not give you uneasiness," returned Mariot.

"Did the thought ever occur to you, Monsieur Mariot, that Redpath may be near us?" inquired Mignon, after a pause.

"Diable!" exclaimed Mariot, with a slight shudder. "I wish you would never speak that name in my hearing."

"Is the dread of that man, then, so strong upon you?" she continued.

"You have chosen an inauspicious subject, mademoiselle!" impatiently rejoined Mariot.

"Possibly so; but, perhaps, you believe in omens, premonitions, and such things?" resumed Miss Bellmar, perceiving the theme annoyed him.

"It matters not; it can make no great difference in our present relations. That I feel dark within, and an unwonted gloom weighs heavily upon me, I confess. I will acknowledge even more than this—there is a vague, yet terrible fear of death upon me!"

Mariot stood with his face to Mignon, his arms folded on his breast. His eyes were turned to her, while he spoke, with an expression that seemed to ask sympathy. At this moment, his lips ceased moving, he groaned, and fell at Mignon's feet, who, thinking he had fainted, looked at him with contempt; but that feeling changed to absolute awe when she discovered the shaft of an arrow, the point of which was lodged in his brain. While she gazed at this spectacle, so unexpected and so fearful, a man rushed from a growth of pines just behind her, and, embracing her, exclaimed: "My daughter! my daughter!"

"My dear father!" cried Mignon, recovering somewhat from her bewilderment, and returning his caresses.

"Beavers and otters!"

Mignon raised her eyes, and saw Brion and Buckeye approaching, and held out both hands to them.

"Welcome! most welcome!" she exclaimed, with a radiant smile.

"Guns and gunpowder!—the cap'n's been most distracted, and gone through all sorts of dangers—twelve fires—three days—roasting—pine splinters!" added Buckeye, venturing to touch Mignon's little hand.

"For which he has my eternal gratitude," said Monsieur Bellmar.

"And mine, I am sure," said Mignon.

"Beard of Smith! he wants more'n that—he wants you, yourself!" quoth Buckeye, bluntly.

"If my father does not say 'No,' why—I think we may possibly arrange it," said Mignon.

"Upon my soul! I believe it's arranged already, and very well arranged, too! Diable! this wretched man died suddenly," added Bellmar.

"There's another that ought to follow him," affirmed Buckeye. "Where is the cretur, I wonder?"

Brion looked around for Headley, but he had disappeared; and we will remark here, as the most appropriate place, that he was never

seen again by any one of the parties; what became of him is not known.

Awed by the fate of Mariot, disappointed by the flight of Headley, and convicted of the error they had committed, the gold-seekers flocked around the partisan, and manifested such signs of repentance, and begged so hard to be received into his band again, that he forgave them. The whole party immediately set out on their return to the encampment at the canon. The trappers that had started for the rescue of Brion from the Blackfeet accompanied him to the rescue of Mignon, but were concealed in a wood about a half a mile distant.

While the body of Mariot was being interred, the partisan and Mignon walked alone, discoursing of recent events. The latter, hearing a sound behind her, turned and beheld Ravenclaw. Brion also discovered him at the same moment.

"Son of the Buffalo!" said he, calmly, "the Great Spirit has given you a charmed life. You have conquered your enemies; you have been as successful in love as on the trail. You will live many moons, and be happy."

"Chief of the Blackfoot nation, may you live longer and be happier than I!" answered Brion, earnestly.

"I ask not for life," returned Ravenclaw, proudly. "The rising and setting of suns can bring no joy to the soul of Ravenclaw; the waning and fulling of moons are to him but meaningless things. But, Son of the Buffalo, it is different with thee; thou hast a country, thou hast Lilyface."

"I have much to live for," said Brion.

"Your people are growing in greatness, even as mine are dwindling away," added Ravenclaw, sadly. "Your nation will soon flow over these mountains, and my race will be pressed to thesea. But I shall not live to see it; I shall have passed to the hunting-grounds when the white man plants upon the graves of my fathers."

"Go with me to the cities of the white man," suggested Brion.

"Cursed be the cities of white men!" cried Ravenclaw.

"Ravenclaw, you have a noble nature," said Mignon, advancing, and laying her hand on his arm. He looked down upon her and smiled. The sunlight shining upon his lofty brow lent a strange charm to his face.

"The voice of Lilyface is like the dove," he added, softly.

"Tell me," resumed Mignon, in a low tone, her hand still upon his arm, "who is Redpath?"

He drew back haughtily, pushing her gently from him; his eyes glittered like fire.

"Lilyface has a short memory; she has forgotten what she heard in yonder mountains. Redpath is the son of the Eagle, and he scorns to share his secret with another. Again I say, I know him not; that to me he is the greatest of all mysteries—mysterious as the soul within me. I repeat it—Redpath will live unknown—he will die high up in the cliffs—no ears shall hear his passing thunder—the pale-face shall never behold his grave. To the great and awful Master of Life he will commend his spirit, and pass away as becomes his name and deeds. Son of the Buffalo, adieu! Lilyface—the chief's voice faltered a little—"Lilyface, farewell, forever!"

Ravenclaw sprang from the rock; his majestic figure was visible an instant, and then was hidden from their sight—they saw him no more.

Brion's trapping campaigns are over. By his own fireside he talks with Mignon of Redpath. Balaam, too, participates in his curiosity. Mignon grows pensive at the mention of his name, and is persuaded to this day, that Ravenclaw and Redpath were one; while Buckeye, in his annual visit to Westport, swears by the "beard of Smith," whatever Mignon says must be true.

THE END.

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